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CROWN-HARDEN.

—

VOL. III.



CROWN-HARDEN.

BY

MRS. FULLER.



"Crystal bubbles
Charm us at once away from all our troubles."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CROWN-HARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

FOR some time after Mr. Orlando Henshawe had taken his departure, Sir Philip Holland continued to fume angrily about his room.

In his own domain, which he seldom quitted, he was absolute lord and master, and somewhat of a tyrant withal; suspicious and jealous, he was always approached with a deference nearly amounting to subserviency, so that the slightest approach to insolence almost maddened him.

"A dirty scoundrel—a thief-taker! A warrant! then that rascal gamekeeper of mine is a rogue after all, with that smooth face of his!"

And he walked more hastily than before, regret as well as anger being added to his sense of discomfort. Rough and uncouth as were his manners, a prepossessing air went as far with him as with any man, and Cecil's appearance had won a certain interest in his mind—that of Blanche still more.

"Crawford—Conway—then she is his sister probably; will that gallow's-bird attorney's clerk interfere with her?"

And he bounced out into the hall, got on his cob, and leisurely took his way to the gamekeeper's cottage, willing to allow time for his superabundant heat to evaporate.

On arriving at the Forest Lodge he dismounted, gave one loud thump with the handle of his whip at the door, and marched

in regardless of any invitation. Mrs. Brewster soon came curtsying in to the little parlour.

“Miss is not very well to-day, Sir, I doubt; she is lying down.

“Then tell her to get up and come here,” said Sir Philip.

Mrs. Brewster, who greatly feared the Baronet’s displeasure, felt considerable alarm, for she was not confident of Blanche’s compliance.

“She was quite frightened in the night, for she thought she see’d something ugly,” the poor woman declared.

“So she did,” muttered Sir Philip, “if it was the thief-catcher—send her down, woman, to me.”

Accordingly Mrs. Brewster bustled off, and with some difficulty persuaded Blanche to make her appearance.

“You have been a long time, young woman, I am not much accustomed to be

kept waiting," was Sir Philip's greeting to her.

"I am sorry," said Blanche, more meekly than she would have spoken, had she not been a good deal depressed.

"Well, well, well," said Sir Philip, in great impatience, as if she intended to bore him with lengthy apologies, which she certainly did not, "never mind, never mind. Your brother won't come home just yet, he has got some business to do—need not be inquisitive—business for me, perhaps; you're too young to be left here by yourself. I'll have you up at the Abbey, you may stay with my housekeeper, Mrs. Arnicott, widow of a poor officer, she'll take care of you."

"Thank you very much indeed," rejoined Blanche, "but I had rather remain here."

"Why? if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"I feel more independent here," she replied.

"Independent!" with a loud, derisive

laugh, "independent ! a baby-girl, more like a doll than anything else ! Come, you may walk by the side of my pony, and your old woman here can follow close behind for propriety sake, and carry your bundle."

Blanche could not help smiling ; six months ago what would she have thought of being asked to pay a first visit on foot, by the side of an old man on a pony, and an old woman walking behind to carry her bundle ! There was something so grotesque in the notion of the procession, that she laughed as she pictured it in her mind.

"Excuse me," she said, with a bend of the graceful head, "I am unable to accept your kind offer."

"Offer ! a girl's head is always running on offers ! I made you none and do not intend. I told you to get ready and come up to the Abbey ! I am not going to run away with you, as I suppose your romances have taught you to expect. I certainly shan't ask you to do anything to please

me, except to sew a button on a shirt perhaps. I dare say you fancy yourself too much of a fine lady to be useful."

"I am afraid I do," Blanche answered.

"Bless my soul! the world is coming to a pretty pass. Well, do you mean to come?"

"I am truly obliged to you, for I am sure you are kind; but I feel a little anxious about my brother, and really wish to remain here."

"Oh, pray do, pray do; good morning;" and he stumped wrathfully to the door.

Blanche ran up to him, put her hand on the lock, and beamed on him her bewitching smile.

"Do not go away angry with me; I feel in low spirits, and only fit to be alone. If I were happy, I should be glad to come."

"You're a witch," he said gruffly, then relenting, "Well, good-bye, little goose;

I forgive you ; you may consider me a friend."

" Thank you, thank you," she said, and so they parted.

CHAPTER II.

SIR PHILIP HOLLAND was not the only protector desirous of guarding Blanche. Ben called on her once, and the night after Orlando Henshawe had so much alarmed her, Mrs. Brewster, who had the qualities of a first-rate gossip where she thought no harm could be done, vented her excitement on Ben Darley.

“My good man thinks it’s only that Miss is nervous ’cause her brother’s away, and she hasn’t had no news on him, but in my notion she’s seen something; what it may be I can’t pretend to say.”

“What does the young lady herself say she saw?” inquired Ben.

“A man is what she says; some bad man she’s afraid on.”

“A man,” repeated Ben scornfully; “I can settle him. I’ll watch by the Lodge to-night, Mrs. Brewster, and every night until her brother comes back. Don’t tell her, it isn’t worth while; but only if she should catch a sight o’ me, or hear a sound of moving outside and she seems frightened, you may say it’s me and there’s no occasion to be afraid.”

“You are a good lad after all,” said Mrs. Brewster kindly. “I wish our Betsy would come home.”

Ben took no notice of this remark; but as soon as it became dark, he took his stand outside, and kept the lodge in sight, faithful as the honest watch-dog, but unknown to her, until daylight rendered his guardianship unnecessary; and as long as Blanche was there he continued his night patrol, and would have done so,

thinking nothing of it, as long as it was needed.

Mrs. Brewster was herself in a state of considerable expectation and doubt; her Betsy was expected home. Betsy had first gone away to service at not sweet, but awkward seventeen, a great, uncouth, rustic Betsy—she returned at twenty a respectable, well-behaved Betsy, and, to forestall events a little, she ere long returned once more, not Betsy, but Elizabeth, or at least, Lizzie, not in coarse linsey and dark worsted stockings, but in a black silk skirt and blue Garibaldi; a splendid, handsome, rich Elizabeth of five-and twenty, with fifty pounds a year. Her old mistress had died, and pleased with her care and good nursing had left her a legacy, so that she was now a lady with an independent fortune.

All the village was alive on the subject, and at last she was seen by the public going to church on an afternoon. Mrs.

Jenkins, the officious charwoman, thus described the effect of Elizabeth Brewster's appearance on her.

“ Well, I see her a-coming on as grand as my lady, in a black silk and a blue smock; I'll take my Bible oath on it. Well, that was bad enough, but that warn't all—no, nor half; what do you think she'd got in her hand, reared aloft over her head, but a blue parasol! It warn't a green one, though that would have been bad enough! it war a blue one, and it giv' me such a turn, if you'll believe me you might ha' knocked me down with a feather! to see her a flaunting about with a blue silk parasol a-nodding about above her head!”

To own the truth, Lizzie Brewster was a little lifted up by her prosperity, and also with a consciousness of worth on one other score. As she told her mother, she had had offers from two powdered footmen, from a stout butler, and from a farmer in

a small way, besides others of less note ; but she had kept her heart true to Ben in spite of all.

“ Poor fellow ! ” she said, pityingly, “ he has his faults. He ain’t not what I’ve a right to look for, I know that ; but I love him, I do, and I’m come home a-purpose, though I did refuse him so stout.”

Lizzy was a pretty and a clever girl, and knew her own value ; but she did long to lay her eyes, as she said, on Ben’s handsome face.

“ Well, my dear,” replied her mother, “ I hope you won’t be disappointed ; I hope you haven’t reckoned without your host, as the saying is. He’s never been the same sin’ poor Jessie died ; but we’ll ask him to tea, we will.”

Old Brewster, who had irreverently made a mock at Lizzie’s high notions when he overheard that Ben was to be invited to tea, made sundry sarcastic and unfeel-

ing remarks that grated sorely on Lizzie's more delicate susceptibilities.

“You women think going out to tea and junketings the first business in life. You think if a man has broke his neck, going out to tea would set it again ; but we men we ain't so fond of your cat-lap and cran-kums. You put on your fine clothes, and you're as happy and proud as peacocks ; but Lord love you, if my old woman was all dressed out in scarlet sattin, she'd be Nancy Brewster still.”

However the invitation was sent to come to tea to meet an old friend. To Lizzie's vexation, the answer was—thanks, but declining the tea, he would look in for half-an-hour later ; for though Ben felt not the slightest desire to do so, it seemed ill-natured to refuse altogether.

He fulfilled his promise and did look in, though in a desultory, unsatisfactory way. His extreme gravity rather disconcerted

poor Lizzie, who had been in great agitation all the evening.

"Well, Ben," she ventured to say at last, as her mother was bustling about, and she was left alone with him, "you see I'm come back as I went—not married yet."

"I suppose so," said Ben, rather absently.

"Nor you ain't neither," she added, attempting a playful tone.

"No, nor likely to be," rejoined Ben, ungallantly.

"Yet I dare say you've seen some pretty girls since I left here?"

"I care for no girls nor women either," said Ben. "The only one I ever cared for lies under a little green mound in the churchyard."

Poor Lizzie was silenced, and could not open her mouth again till her mother came back.

He left as soon as he decently could. He had not once glanced at Lizzie's silk

gown, nor even at her pretty face; for when you did look through the little flutter of new-fledged grandeur, it was a pretty and a kind face. But she was not going to be beaten so.

One afternoon she caught sight of him wandering alone, as he often did, and she went carelessly sauntering forth on the road he would come home by, of course never thinking she should meet him, and by a strange chance that could not have happened otherwise she did meet him and turned with him.

"You look so lonely, Ben, and I feel lonely, too. I don't like being alone, and that's the truth."

"Then walk alongside o' me," he said.

"Shan't I trouble you?" she asked.

"No, not if you hold your tongue."

This was a rebuff, and Lizzie did not speak for fully five minutes.

"You don't know what the folks about here say?"

“Nor don’t care,” was the reply. “They do say that you’ve fell in love with the gamekeeper’s beautiful sister that used to be here.”

He turned round on her in displeasure, and at last not only looked at her but stared.

“I should as soon think of falling in love with one of Queen Victoria’s Princesses!”

“Well, I beg your pardon, Ben, you don’t seem easy to please nowadays, let one say what one will,” observed Lizzie, rather piteously and half disposed to cry.

“My poor girl,” said Ben, more kindly, but not in a gratifying way, “you can’t understand these things—you can’t understand me.”

And again there was a pause.

“You did not always think so, not when you asked me to marry you!”

“Ah! then I thought you’d have made a kind mother to my little Jessie!”

His voice trembled, and he dashed away a tear or two with the back of his hand.

This was a blow. Then it was only for Jessie's sake, after all! She felt mortification, disappointment, and one short flash of anger; but when she saw those two or three drops of water, all was swallowed up in pity.

"And so I would have tried to be, that I would," she said, in real emotion.

Ben felt it in a moment.

"You do not know, Lizzie, what it is to lose what one loves."

"Yes I do," said Lizzie, her tears falling.

Ben glanced at her.

"You refused me," he said.

"Ah, Ben! my lips said no; but my heart said yes."

"I have nothing to offer, scarce even a heart," said Ben, "but"—

The next moment she was in his arms, how it was managed it was an absolute impossibility to say; but no manly fellow like

Ben could press a loving girl to his heart and remain cold, and Lizzie was content; it was not quite the love she had dreamed of, but it was the best he had to give, and she thanked him for it.

“Ben,” she said, as they walked home, “I know you can’t think of weddings and such like yet a while—not for months—but you’ll be true to me, as I’ve been to you, lad.”

“Have you been true to me, Lizzie—did you at times think of me?”

“I never left off, Ben, that I didn’t.”

“And did you think of—”

“Of little Jessie?” she said, “yes, and I cried till I could not see out of my eyes, for I said that’ll break my Ben’s heart.”

With such kind and loving words Lizzie soothed the wound she could not heal, and Ben became truly attached to her, though it did give her a little pain that he was so willing to have their marriage put off an indefinite time.

“ Ay, towards Autumn perhaps,” he had said, and this was only Summer ; but as she said very proudly to her mother,

“ Well, mother, if Ben can afford to wait—I’m sure I can. It ain’t me that wants a husband. I could have plenty, if I liked.”

Ben, to own the truth did a little shrink from weddings and feastings ; he would not so much have minded, if it could have been done some morning when nobody knew anything about it ; but this would have been too much indignity for Mrs. Brewster to endure, nor perhaps would Lizzie quite have liked it.

He loved Lizzie better each day, still he never again could fill his whole heart with the engrossing, passionate, protecting love he had once felt and never forgot for his little angel Jessie.

CHAPTER III.

ROSAMOND persuaded Cecil to remain quietly in the tower the following day, where he was perfectly safe during the absence of Orlando Henshawe and Stephen Granville, but either might return at any moment. She would not be able to see Mr. Henshawe senior till the next morning, when he had promised to call and let her know the proceedings of the young men.

Old Mr. Henshawe would not have moved his little finger to stay the course of justice, were it his own son who was in danger, yet he had no desire to see young

Conway, who had already suffered deeply, consigned to a prison.

He never asked himself the question whether Cecil was guilty or innocent. That must be decided in a court of justice, and he would not dream of acting in so unlawyer-like a manner as to prejudge a case which would come before a competent tribunal.

He well knew that if Rosamond could assist him to escape, she would ; if she had any knowledge of his whereabouts, it was no business of his, and if it suited her to know the movements of his pursuers, there was no law that prevented his informing her.

If Cecil were in his power, no entreaties or expostulations would avail, he would give him up without fail ; at the same time he infinitely preferred his being kept out of the way, nor did he consider himself bound to take any active measures to find him.

Rosamond knew all this as well as if it had been explained to her in words, therefore though she used every precaution to hide from him the place of her cousin's concealment, she felt little fear of his detecting it.

Old Benson imagined he was somewhere near, though even he was ignorant of the existence of the upper room in the tower; but he would sooner have cut off his hand than betray his secret if he had known it.

Rosamond was in the garden, awaiting impatiently the arrival of the lawyer, when her ears were struck by the hasty gallop of a horse.

Every sound of hurried movement terrified her; she turned faint, all seemed to darken before her eyes, until with a rush of joy she recognized in the new comer Henry Villeroy.

He advanced quickly towards her, and took her hand in silence.

"I was from home till late last night, and only heard to-day of these unhappy occurrences. I well know your goodness, Miss Granville, and am sure they must deeply pain you."

"They do," said Rosamond, her tears falling as she spoke.

"You do not believe Cecil is to blame?" he asked anxiously. "I am as certain of his unblemished honour as of my own."

"I know it," said Rosamond fervently.

"I wish to heaven I knew where he was! I wish I could assist him!" exclaimed Villeroy.

Rosamond glanced rapidly round.

"He is near here," she said.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Villeroy.

"Is that safe? Surely not!"

"I think the safest place of any just now, Mr. Villeroy. But I am so thankful to be able to consult you. Oh! I need a friend, I need advice!"

"Tell me, dearest Miss Granville, where is he?"

"In the ruined tower," said Rosamond, "Oh! do not look that way, in case we are watched."

"There he cannot remain long concealed," said Villeroy, "we must get him off. I understand that he really would be in danger if taken, circumstances seem strangely unfavourable to him, poor fellow; otherwise, no doubt, his best course would be to come forward and meet it boldly."

"Oh, but all is against him," exclaimed Rosamond; "I do believe it would go against him, and then think, Mr. Villeroy, oh, think of the consequences."

"Yes," said Villeroy musingly, "that would never do; could not we get him off in my yacht? so near, I see no chance for him to remain undiscovered."

"There is a chamber above," explained Rosamond, "that no one knows of; the access is very difficult and unlikely to be

observed; all the many years I have used it no one ever found it out."

"That alters the case," remarked Villeroy; "still if a search were made by the police, be sure they would discover it."

"I get to know through Mr. Henshawe all they propose doing," said Rosamond; "at present we are safe here; it has never occurred to them that he might be in this neighbourhood. Shall we sit down on this bench, Mr. Villeroy? I feel safer here than in the house; we cannot be overheard. They are searching in London and about the coast. I shall hear more soon."

"Do not you think I ought to see Miss Conway?" asked Villeroy; "if she were to hear of this alone, unfriended"

"I pray that she may not," exclaimed Rosamond; "oh, it would be dreadful, Mr. Villeroy; you know best, I will be entirely guided by you. If you think it best to go to Blanche now, do so; only remember, after all, her peace depends

wholly on Cecil's safety. She loves him devotedly."

"It is true," said Villeroy, "she might reproach me for forsaking him when I might possibly serve him here. As you say, I do not think Conway is in danger as long as Stephen and the lawyer's son are absent. If they come back"

"Oh, then," said Rosamond, "I should tremble; perhaps it would be wiser to get him off at once, but I do not know where Stephen is; he is scouring all the country round. If he should fall in with him!" And she bent her head on the arm of the bench by her side and wept.

"Dear Miss Granville," said Villeroy, "do not grieve; I cannot bear to see you in sorrow. Cecil has such warm friends that I must think he will do well."

She looked up and smiled on him through her tears.

"I feel such trust in you," she said, "I know that I may."

"You read my heart aright, Rosamond; you may indeed," he replied.

"Mr. Henshawe is coming this morning," she rejoined; "do wait and hear what he says; then we can again consult on what we ought to do. He may have heard what the intentions of his son and the other one are. Shall we come into the house?"

Villeroy followed her into the dining-room. Had a thunderbolt fallen, she could not have started more: there stood her brother! He just nodded slightly to them both, then called out, "We have found him!"

Rosamond would have fallen if Villeroy had not supported her; he, more self-possessed, felt persuaded it was a falsehood.

"Where did you find him?" he inquired.

"Oh," said Stephen, fixing a keen gaze on Rosamond, "along the sea-coast.

It was a violent revulsion of feeling, but

her prudence stood her in good stead ; she did not betray the slightest change of countenance.

“ And where is he now ? ” asked Villeroy. Stephen laughed.

“ The —— knows ; I don’t.”

Rosamond looked up and clasped her hands, but spoke not.

“ A nice affectionate sister you are ! I’ve been working like a galley-slave, and I may starve, too, for what you care ! —— it ! You fine, sentimental, high-flown people never have an ounce of natural affection ! ”

Rosamond rang the bell, and ordered luncheon in at once.

“ Mr. Henshawe is coming this morning,” she said.

“ Mr. Henshawe is a fool ! Orlando has ten times his sense. Is not Orlando come yet ? He was to have met me here to-day.”

Poor Rosamond’s heart sank.

"I should not much wonder," continued Stephen, "if he was skulking about here, after all. If he is, by Jove, we'll unkennel him! We'll unearth him—a sneaking vagabond! I'll have a detective down. They're a stupid set; but I'm pretty sharp and I've got a plan in my head."

"What is it?" asked Rosamond.

"Don't you think you may get it? No, Miss Rosamond, there's a traitor in the camp I know well."

"Miss Granville," said Villeroy, haughtily, "I do not see why you should remain to see this gentleman eat his luncheon. You generally have yours up-stairs, I think?"

"Yes," answered Rosamond, glad to escape the hateful presence.

"Will you see Mr. Henshawe, senior, when he comes?" asked Villeroy.

"Please," said Rosamond, faintly.

"Mr. Henshawe, senior, won't be here yet a while," put in Stephen. "Is the dog-cart in?"

"Yes," replied Rosamond; "do you want it?"

"I suppose I do, or I should not ask," was the reply, as Stephen rang the bell and ordered it in his usual rude way.

Villeroy gave the servant the message to Mr. Henshawe, and accompanied Rosamond up to the library. Stephen stared at him, but waited till the door was shut, and then exclaimed :

"—— his impudence !"

Rosamond and Villeroy entered the library, and she sank down on the sofa.

"Oh, Mr. Villeroy !" she cried.

"Why should you be alarmed?" he said. "Keep up your courage and there is nothing to fear."

"But his plan. What can it be?"

"Nothing. It was only meant to alarm you."

But though Villeroy thus spoke, he had his misgivings. There was a malignant

sparkle in Stephen's small, sharp black eyes that spoke of mischief.

"But," urged Rosamond, "his saying that he might be about here?"

"That I am sure was a venture," said Villeroy, "merely to try you, and you behaved bravely. As long as you are so courageous and prudent, I fear nothing."

"Ought we to try to get him off to-night?" asked Rosamond.

"No, I think not," Villeroy replied. "That rascal, young Henshawe, may be here to-night, it seems; but I dare say he will soon be off again. So may Stephen. We will be on the watch. I will stay as long as I can, and shall not be far off in the evening. If you want me pass your candle twice before your window—I shall see it. I will come straight up the front way. Benson can admit me. Probably no one will see me; if they do, I shall say I have a letter for you from my mother, sent express from Hellingsley. If it causes

them to suspect anything, it will be that Cecil is in that neighbourhood, and they will go after the false scent. If you do not want me to-night the same excuse will do for to-morrow."

"Your kind, generous friendship inspires me with fresh hope," said Rosamond.

"You well know I could do no less. Who should, if not I, dearest Miss Granville?"

She gave him a gentle smile and he took his leave. At the same time a note was brought in from Mr. Henshawe senior, saying he begged her to excuse him that morning, but he was under an engagement to be at Sir Charles Townsend's, where he expected to meet Mr. Stephen Granville, so that he would be prevented from paying his respects at Crown-Harden that day as he had intended. He added that he had heard from his son, who would arrive that night, and was coming over to Crown-

Harden the next morning to see Stephen: "They take great liberties with your house, Miss Granville," he concluded, "but I thought you might prefer knowing what takes place."

Rosamond perceived that she now had a few hours clear, and resolved not to lose the opportunity of paying one more visit to the tower, where she feared that Cecil might be short of provisions; she might not have many more chances of seeing him there, and she determined not to lose this.

In less than half an hour she was on the broken stairs, and Cecil stood ready to assist her.

"How cold you are, Cecil, how you shiver! I am so sorry! I wish I dared light the fire. Dearest Cecil! are you not well? tell me."

"Oh, Rosamond! I must tell you."

"Tell me, dear Cecil," she said gently.

All that was in his heart was on the

verge of his lips, but he recollected himself in time; he was bound in honour to be silent.

“I ought to leave this place,” he said.

“Oh, you are safe here!” she exclaimed.

“I do not think I am,” he answered, not even recollecting at the moment the perils of his own situation, “but as long as I am here, I am your vassal, and bound to obey you only.”

Rosamond thought his manner was unusual, his words almost incoherent—she feared it was his trouble, and she was sorry.

“Let us think,” she said, sitting on the deep window-sill. She drew him down by her side, and leaning her cheek on her hand, she rested it on his arm, while he sat motionless and passive.

After a time he said,

“Rosamond, will you tell me all they can say against me, if it does not weary you?”

"Do you wish it?—really?" she asked.

"Yes, if you please."

Rosamond reflected, and then told him word for word almost what the lawyer had told her.

"It does look black," said Cecil, "but you believe me innocent?"

"Oh, Cecil! do not ask those questions—it grieves me," she said, reproachfully.

"Then I will have courage," he resumed.

"I have seen Villeroy," Rosamond continued, "he will do anything for us."

Cecil turned pale, but the next moment said with feeling,

"He is a true friend—and every way worthy."

"Yes," assented Rosamond, "if you leave suddenly, he would wish to go to Blanche without loss of time, where should he seek for her?"

"She is near Holland Abbey, his uncle's place. At Forest Lodge, we went by the name of Crawford."

"Crawford, Holland Abbey, Forest Lodge," repeated Rosamond, "I shall remember. Dearest Cecil, if you have to go abroad after Blanche has joined you, and all is safe, may I come and see you?"

"May you!" he exclaimed, scarcely daring to trust himself to speak another word; but, after a pause, he said, affectionately, "I think, Rosamond, you know how to give comfort when there seems none."

"I hear the dog-cart," she said, "I had better go. If possible, I will come up again to-night; you must feel very lonely here, dear Cecil."

And with these words she hastened away, for she did not wish to be seen near the tower.

On re-entering the house she heard that Stephen had just returned with Mr. Henshawe, and she went down into the dining-room to receive them. The lawyer was there alone.

"I have no news to give, Miss Granville, but I thought you would prefer even to know that much."

"I thank you sincerely, dear Mr. Henshawe," she said.

The lawyer shook his head. Rosamond well knew that he wished for no confidences, nor had she the slightest intention of making any.

She only saw Stephen for five minutes, and he was so evidently tired out that he had not even a rude word for her.

It was clear that nothing was to be done that evening; even this small respite she was thankful for. She did not, however, dare to think of going to the tower till quite late. Once she nearly gave up her intention of visiting him that night at all. But he would then think danger was imminent, and might possibly have distinguished the dog-cart driving up with Stephen. He appeared so depressed and sad when she saw him last that she

could not bear to leave him all through the night to melancholy thoughts and forebodings.

She heard Stephen go to his bed-room, bang his door to, and lock it as he always did. Happily his windows looked out the other way, and from his appearance of extreme fatigue when he passed her, she was sure he would soon be sound asleep.

Still she twice went to her door and turned back trembling. She had seldom felt such an agony of terror. If she were discovered—if it were she who betrayed him—if Stephen's plan were to spy out her proceedings!

So she doubted and hesitated; but when the large stable-clock struck one, her resolution was taken. She would go.

There was, unfortunately, a young moon. It gave but little light, but she would have wished for the thickest darkness.

She put on a black cloak, and with foot-

steps light and noiseless as snow-flakes, she descended the stairs, opened the door, and stole out.

The delicate crescent moon hung above the dark cliffs and woods of Baltyre, floating in a sky of deepest, yet transparent, purple; a group of black firs stood like a funeral plume above the tower, while near, the leaves above her head faintly shivered in the warm air.

As she rapidly moved forward she heard the shrubs slightly disturbed; it might be a hare aroused by her footsteps, light as they were, or a bird shifting its night-perch—no, she became assured it was no such harmless creature. Still with an effort she suppressed the scream that had nearly escaped her, when she heard a voice gently whisper, “Rosamond,” and she knew it was Henry Villeroy. She immediately stopped, and he came through the bushes up to her.

“Do not go up to-night,” he said, “I

saw a light moving in the house, first to the front door then to the one you went out by ; it is your brother, finding it unfastened he came out, and is seeking about the garden."

"What shall I do? seeing me here will so clearly point out to him the way to the tower, he will guess it all!" Rosamond gasped in terror.

"If you did not mind his finding you with me—but you would not like it," suggested Villeroy.

"I care not," she said impetuously, "I care for nothing! but not here—not on the road to him."

"Through here, towards the front," said Villeroy, pointing to the way he had come by, a tangled, overgrown path, nearly closed up, by which he, by springing over the palings that formed the boundary, had often in former days conveyed to Rosamond letters from the

brother she now so anxiously sought to avoid.

“Yes, yes,” she answered hurriedly, “I will follow. Oh, quick!” And keeping close behind Villeroy, she flew like a lapwing through the brushwood into a sheltered laurel walk, where, half exhausted, she took her companion’s arm and leant upon it slowly advancing.

In less than five minutes Stephen came upon them, he made a spring forward, but paused on recognising Villeroy.

“What, Miss Rosomond! the demure, saintly Miss Rosamond meeting a lover at night! an assignment at this hour—and alone!”

“Yes, Stephen,” said Rosamond, turning fearlessly upon him, “you take possession of this house, bring your acquaintances, issue your commands here as if it were your own, and if I desire to have a few words in private with a man of honour, such as Mr. Villeroy is, I seize

the opportunity without expecting to have a spy upon my track. Go back to the house, Stephen, and leave me in peace—or wait, I will return with you; Mr. Villeroy, I believe we have nothing more to say; if there is, you will call early to-morrow.”

Henry Villeroy pressed her hand, and left her. Stephen accompanied her back to the house.

“So you are engaged to Villeroy, are you?” inquired Stephen.

“You will know in time,” answered Rosamond.

“Come,” thought Stephen to himself, “this is better than old Orlando. By Jove! if Lord Dornington went off the hooks this would be jolly. Any way, it’s rather a peg above Orlando Henshawe. I can easily kick him overboard when I’ve done with him, but to think of the girl’s luck!” for Stephen had not the remotest consciousness of his sister’s attrac-

tions, but thought of her only as the plain child of three years ago.

“What a hypocrite it is !” he continued to soliloquize, “she shall not soon hear the end of this.”

“So, Miss Rosamond,” he resumed aloud, “you are not particular about a trifle of impropriety. I shall like to hear a little more of your very respectable and well-conducted goings on.”

With such vulgar banter he tormented her, till they again separated for their different destinations; but Rosamond, though vexed at his insolence, regarded it but little. She was encompassed with fears, she thought the hunters were pressing round nearer and nearer on the devoted quarry, until there was but a narrow road of escape left.

The greater the danger, the more vigilant was the watch she kept on the movements of the enemy. In the morning early, she noticed Orlando Henshawe and

her brother eagerly conferring with each other and searching about the premises; then they went together towards the yard.

She watched them from an upper window that looked on the back, and saw Stephen cautiously approach Turk, the old mastiff, give him some bits of meat, pat him, and finally unfasten the chain that attached him to his kennel. The dog seemed suspicious at first, but gradually allowed himself to be won over, forgiving many an old grudge.

He was often loose when Rosamond was at home alone, but she had him chained up while Stephen was at Crown-Harden, deeming it safer, for he always had a spite against the animal. She was sure, therefore, that these friendly advances meant no good. She partly guessed their meaning, and her doubts were soon solved when she saw Stephen showing the dog some of Cecil's clothes that he had left behind him.

A shooting coat, more especially, the faithful creature evidently recognised, he smelt it in every direction, then lifted up his nose and whined.

"Go seek, good dog, go seek," they said, and Orlando and his friend looked at each other and laughed boisterously.

Rosamond waited no longer; she flew down, put on a hat and cloak that hung in the hall, and ran up the shrubbery walk to the tower. She arrived safely, and as no one was near, she ventured to go up the stairs to Cecil's apartment.

"I see," he said, "your face tells me all—I am discovered."

"No, no," she answered, "but they are seeking about, only remain still—still as death, dear Cecil, and we need not fear. I dare not stay, I will meet them downstairs, if they come here."

She went down again, carefully fastening and screening the opening, and taking out a writing-case, laid a sheet of paper

on it and began a letter, for Stephen well knew it was her habit to spend hours there when she wished for uninterrupted quiet. Soon she heard them approaching, Stephen encouraging the dog with his voice; but still she sat moving her hand over the paper mechanically, her heart beating tumultuously one moment, and stopping short the next.

At last Stephen entered, and started at seeing Rosamond sitting there quietly writing.

"Do you want anything?" she asked coldly, while the dog ran up to her with such demonstrations of pleasure at joining her that it might well be supposed it was only she he had followed up thither; soon, however, though she refrained from appearing to look after him, he began zealously smelling and snuffing about, and was coming very near the place where the aperture was.

"Good dog, good Turk," she said, call-

ing him to her. "Stephen, what do you want to do to the poor dog? you know that I never allow you to meddle with him. Come here, Turk."

Stephen in the meantime was peering eagerly round, searching with his eyes every corner. There was a red curtain to shield off a broken part of the wall; he lifted it aside and looked behind it, but she, affecting not to notice him, continued caressing the dog.

"I am engaged," she said in some displeasure, and in the stiff manner she always assumed when Orlando Henshawe was near, "as soon as you have concluded your visit I will finish my letter."

Stephen stared at her doubtingly, then turned to go, whistling to the dog.

"No, thank you," she said, "Turk will remain with me."

Stephen, and his friend, who had stood half-outside the open door, went off again

together, and Rosamond was able to breathe once more.

"She was determined to keep the dog," observed Orlando.

"She always is a fool about that brute," answered Granville; "she fancies I am going to put it to the torture whenever I go near it."

"She looked uncommon cool," remarked Orlando, "not a bit taken by surprise; I don't think she's up to anything."

"I don't know what to think," said Stephen; "'still waters run deep,' you know. I'll have another look at that rum old tower she's so taken with when she's out of the way. So you mean to be off again to-day, old fellow, do you?"

"Yes," answered Orlando, "or to-morrow. By George! if he's crossing the herring-pond all this time we're sold."

"I suppose the fellow really did get hold of the will," said Stephen.

"Of course he did," replied Orlando;

why, where in heaven's name else can it be? I've no faith in ghosts, have you?"

"I say, Orlando," insinuated Granville, "you don't know anything yourself—eh?"

"I?" exclaimed Henshawe, "no, by all that's sacred! If Conway has not got it, I can no more imagine what's become of it than Bennock's baby. No, Stephen, I'm not such a rascal as that comes to. I should never run out in that line. If I'm not speaking truth, I wish I may be struck dead this moment. I never suspected *you*, Stephen."

"No more you need; Conway must have got it, I suppose," said Granville; "yet, though I hate him like poison, I wonder at it; I can't help wondering."

"Well, never doubt me," said Orlando; "remember, I've been away all the time; besides, I might do worse things, but I never did that and never should; and what for in the ——'s name should I? But how could anyone get hold of it? that's what

beats me. I myself can only half believe Conway took it; but if he didn't, who did? I was thinking of it all last night. I'm sharp enough, but I can't make out any other way, turn it how I will. He must have it—can't be otherwise. If he's paid out, it makes little odds to me whether he deserves it or not; that's the truth, and I don't mince it. At the same time I cannot—do and think and puzzle as I will—I cannot account in any other way for its disappearance. Miss Rosamond does not act the Sonnambula in the night, does she?"

"No," Stephen replied, "besides, that girl, Sarah Benson—who is a suspicious brute if there ever was one—hangs the gown in the wardrobe and locks it up, and takes the wardrobe key away with her."

"Could she have anything to do with it?" asked Orlando.

"Not she, I'm sure," said Stephen.

"And then the old housekeeper locks the doors of the two rooms, the library and the study, I mean, and she and old Benson unlock them in the morning themselves, at least the library—the study is generally kept locked. They are regular honest, careful old folks. No, none of the servants have anything to do with it, I'll take my 'davy on it!"

"Then we come back to the old story—it must be Conway," said Orlando.

"Of course it must. No man knows what he'll do till he's tempted," concluded Granville.

Though both these men would have condemned Cecil, guilty or innocent, if it had been in their power, they would both have been disappointed to have known that he had not committed the crime imputed to him.

They wished to see him degraded as well as unfortunate. There was a triumph in

believing that his deeds were worse than their own.

Rosamond had never ceased, however painful it might be, to show what attention she could to her brother, and still continued to do so, though just at this time it was peculiarly disagreeable to her. As she had expressly desired him not to come to her upstairs, she generally spent part of the day with him below; so as he came in this afternoon, he found her in the dining-room reading or appearing to read.

"I say, Rosamond," he began, abruptly, "in that old tower you have taken under your protection, is there any hole or hiding-place up-stairs—hey?"

Rosamond did not raise her head, but the page before her grew grey and dim, and danced before her eyes, keeping time with her rapid pulses.

"Have you got a hiding-place in your old tower up-stairs, I say?" he repeated.

"What?" said Rosamond, looking up, bewildered.

"You heard me, I know," retorted her brother.

"Up-stairs!" she repeated. "Where are the stairs?"

"Why, if there *is* a place there's a way up to it. Those arrow slits are too narrow to let in even your narrow shoulders, Miss, or I should have managed to try them before now, high up as they are; but that's nothing to me. If anybody is skulking up there we can easily dodge him. Set a watch below, and starve him out, eh?"

"Let me know if you do," said Rosamond, affecting indifference, and again looking down on her book.

"I'll tell you what, you get more moping and dull every day—you want variety. I'll bring two or three of my friends here, and cheer you up a bit."

"Stephen," she said, "I wish you to consider this your home, and you are

always welcome here, but I will not admit your friends."

"Bah! will not—a thing like you! I will not have you, an unmarried girl, living here by yourself. I shall speak to Sir Charles Townsend about it. You must have a companion—a she-bear leader. You are not fit to be out of leading-strings, and never will be. I ought to show you a little life."

"Life!" repeated Rosamond, with a faint smile, "your life, as you call it, would not suit me; I hope, Stephen, it will not cost you too dear!"

"Oh! no fear of that if you really are rational enough to mean in money. I'm not like that ass, Conway, who, for a little pleasure, must empty out his purse. I'm no fool—I know better. I enjoy myself at other people's expense."

"In that one sentence you comprise all that is odious in man or woman! Yes, enjoy yourself at other people's expense—

the very motto of all wickedness!" exclaimed Rosamond, indignantly.

"Oh, come! none of your heroics for me!" sneered Granville, "I snap my fingers at them! I'm not like you, remember—you are neither fish, flesh, nor fowl; you are a bat, that's dead all day and night, and comes out alone in the twilight to snap at midges. I'll give you a warning. Take care you don't end by going to the mad-house."

Rosamond, with a start and gaze of horror, looked wildly at her brother, and seemed turned to stone by the cruel sparkle of his eye. She read the evil thought that crossed his mind.

"Why," he continued, with a forced laugh, "Sandy there in the stables is a deal better company than you."

And whistling a tune in a wild minor key, he strode out of the room.

"Good heavens!" Rosamond exclaimed, "Blanche penniless! Cecil condemned!

and I in a mad-house! are those his thoughts!"

She would not say his wishes; a gloom seemed thrown around her, deeper and more horrible than the darkness of sorrow—the gloom of guilt—and by whom? by one who had been nursed in her mother's arms, and drawn nourishment from the same source; whom she, a baby herself, had fondled as an infant, and loved as a child—on whom so many fond hopes had rested, all to be blighted. Even her thoughts of Cecil were obscured for a time, until the recollection of his words flashing upon her gave a different direction to her anxieties.

CHAPTER IV.

CECIL had heard Granville and Orlando Henshawe in the room below him, and had seen them go. A new agony of impatience came over him.

“No,” he said to himself, “I cannot remain here to be caught like a rat in a trap—to be dragged out ignominiously from my hiding place. I will, for the sake of Blanche and dear Rosamond, make one dash for it, freedom is worth that; but if I cannot succeed, I will give myself up. I can no longer bear this horrible inactivity—this wearing, tantalizing suspense, so near her, yet so remote. If I am taken here, it will bring annoyance,

perhaps reproach, on her. I will go to-night, I should like to see her once more, I could not leave without attempting to thank her for her goodness."

In these fluctuating fears, desires, and anxieties the hours passed; happily for him, Stephen and Orlando Henshawe went that evening to Deerham, and during their absence Rosamond ventured once more to see him.

Cecil then told her that he must go. That he was certain they had suspicions of his being in the neighbourhood, that the tower would be searched, and that if they were away for the night his best plan would be to start as soon as it became dark.

"I will take your advice and go over the hills to Baltyre, a quiet little place, from which I can get to a station on the South-Western and go on board a steam-packet, or fishing-boat, or whatever offers. I could buy a small boat and cross this fine weather without difficulty. But, Rosa-

mond, how can I thank you? I am too grateful to know how to express my feelings. You believe me?"

"I think you feel kindly towards me, Cecil, and that is the only thing I desire. Gratitude is not what I either wish for or deserve, your friendship I do prize."

"Dearest Rosamond!" he held her hand to his heart. It was a struggle to forbear from a more impassioned farewell, but his situation was not one for self-indulgence; he had no right to seek her love, and he refrained from act or word that might betray his own.

"Will not you put on some disguise?" she asked.

"No, I cannot, it would only embarrass me," he answered.

"Here," she said, "is a trifling portion of the value of those things you intend to dispose of."

He drew back.

"No," she added, "it is the truth, half

of what belongs to you would amount to much more than this. You may need it—it may make all the difference between safety and ruin.”

He thanked her and accepted it. He ate what he could of the refreshments she had brought him, and with another affectionate farewell she left him, cheerful as long as she was in his presence, but when she had turned on her homeward way, oppressed with a despondency so deep that all hope seemed departed, and life almost extinguished.

Cecil had scarcely been beyond the narrow limits of his tower-chamber since he entered it, except that at grey dawn, before objects became distinct, he had sought out a spot near that he used to frequent when he was a boy, but which he had never visited since he was twelve years old.

He had made his way through a thicket, to a small open space at the foot of the

cliffs, where were the remains of an ancient bath that had probably, in long bygone days, been a favourite resort of some long perished beauty.

It was large and deep, lined with small, glossy white tiles, overhung with thick masses of Portugal laurel, wild rose, and honeysuckle. A lively stream of clear, cold water sprang down from the rock above into its basin, while the broad yellow iris, and long trailing streamers of blue periwinkle ever trembled, agitated by the draught of air caused by the running water. Opposite, at its lower end, a grass bank sloped down to the bright surface, from whence the bather could easily descend into the cool depths below.

Here Cecil had early each morning enjoyed a plunge and swim in the cold waters unseen, and as he believed, unheard; but a restless spirit had prompted one prying enemy to wander at unsus-

pected hours in that neighbourhood only the morning before. Nothing could be distinguished from where he stood in the doubtful semi-obscurity of twilight, but the sounds in the agitated water had excited suspicion; was it the splash of the waterfowl, could it be the wild duck leading her young brood across the silent pool? He listened eagerly—no, he thought, scarcely. But whatever he might have imagined, he said not a word. If a discovery were to be made, he would have the undivided merit of it.

Utterly unsuspecting of stealthy inquiry, Cecil watched anxiously the last pale orange streaks in the fading sky; it seemed as if that evening daylight would never die out, the birds were still singing joyously.

“When that blackbird has finished his last ballad,” thought Cecil, “I will go.”

At last all was silent except the fluttering of the leaves. The glow of sunset had

melted away, the grey twilight stealthily crept on, and Cecil stumbled his way down the dark staircase, removed the panel, replaced it as Rosamond had begged him to do, and stepped out on the cool grass in the fresh evening air. He took a long breath, and his spirits revived, animated by the change from the dull confinement of the small, closed-up chamber.

He walked rapidly and steadily onward, up the steep slopes skirting beneath the high cliffs; only once he paused to look back at the grim tower he had left, and to send a last, silent farewell to that dear being he loved more than life. A rushing pang of longing and regret almost overpowered him, but he would not yield to it; he hastily drew his handkerchief across his face and eyes, and again hurried forward, now ascending the crags and climbing up steep steps in the rocks, where a false movement would have sent him headlong down the precipice. The motion, the

effort, the spice of danger gave new energy to his spirits ; youth, activity and renewed hope inspired him. In those places that were overshadowed by the trees he had to feel with his hand for a place to set his foot, but he cared little ; so light of heart had he become that he could almost have whistled—he felt that freedom was a joy-giving, happy thing !

At last he reached the high downs ; all was bare and solitary. He could have seen around him for miles, had there been light enough ; and by-and-by the young moon, still a crescent, palely illumined the wide expanse of high mountain level ; a few stars shone large and clear, and the elastic air of the hills sent his young pulses blythe and swift through his heart.

During three parts of the night he paced on untired ; indeed he only feared lest dawn should overtake him before he should reach Baltyre. But now, a short distance off, he perceived a dusky speck on the path before

him ; which gradually, as it approached, took size and form until he discerned plainly that it was the figure of a boy advancing towards him. He was rather surprised at meeting him in so lonely a place and at such an hour ; nor was he much pleased when the lad stopped short in front of him, scanning him as closely as he could by the uncertain light.

“ Please, Sir, if you are C. C., this is from a friend ;” and he held out to him a letter, which, with some trouble and the assistance of a wax lucifer out of his cigar-case, he was able to decipher :

“ Dear Cecil,

“ Do not come to Baltyre ; it is watched, so are the stations along the line and all the places about. Placards are up. You had better go back to the place you came from for the present. R. sent me here on the look-out. Your friend,

“ VILLEROY.”

A revulsion of feeling almost overcame Cecil, who perceived that to attempt escape would be hopeless; every rural policeman at all the villages and petty country towns, indeed any man who coveted the reward, that was no doubt offered, might lay his hands on him, and what would be the use of resistance? None, except to make the capture still more degrading and humiliating.

His determination was taken. Mr. Townsend, a brother of Sir Charles Townsend, the guardian of Rosamond, had a little shooting box among the hills, where he believed he was now staying. He was a magistrate and at any rate a gentleman, he would at once go thither, and give himself up; it must come sooner or later, what was the use of putting off the evil day?

“Do you know the way to Mr. Townsend’s shooting lodge, my boy?” he asked.

"Yes, Sir, if you mean Squire Towns-
end's, I do."

"Well," said Cecil, "show me the
nearest way, and I will give you half-a-
crown."

The boy grinned with delight; the night
that was so unhappy for Cecil was a
lucky one for him, and he marched along
sturdily towards a hollow in the downs
where grew a few stunted trees, among
which flowed a gurgling streamlet.

They got over a rough stile and through
a spinny that opened upon a little garden
and small stone house. Here Cecil
knocked loudly at the door, and in
due time an elderly woman opening
it a very little way, inquired who it
was.

"Sure!" she said, "not the doctor!"

"Here is my card," said Cecil, "take
it up to your master."

"Master is not very well, and it's only

to Mr. Townsend that the situation was not exactly a pleasant one for Cecil ; but he was a man who would think more of his own little finger than of his neighbour's head. There was, however, some excuse for him—he was an old bachelor.

After a few more remarks on his cough, his feverishness and other symptoms, he went out of the room to send for the woman's husband who lived a little lower down the glen.

“Lord bless you, Sir! you had better not stay ; there's no one here to trouble you. Master is but poorly. I should be sorry for such a nice-looking young gentleman to come to trouble,” she said.

“Thank you kindly,” said Cecil, with his winning smile, “but I shall trust to Providence.”

The woman shook her head, then went out and brought in wine and sandwiches.

“Do have something, Sir—do,” she en-

treated. "You look but pale—you are tired, I warrant."

Mr. Townsend now re-entered the room.

"Pray, Mr. Conway, have a glass of wine. Help yourself. I must go and wrap up if we are to drive in an open carriage. I have no other here. Most unfortunate!"

And Mr. Townsend again laboriously mounted the stairs, making a great show of asthma and fatigue, to guard himself still more completely against the night air with cloaks and comforters.

In due time he came down again, offering various rugs and wraps to Cecil, who declined them.

"I believe the conveyance, such as it is, is ready, Mr. Conway," he said; and following his host to the door, Cecil saw an old-fashioned gig, with a stout, middle-aged countryman prepared to mount and stand behind.

"I cannot possibly go as far as Deer-

ham," said Mr. Townsend. "I will leave you at Crown-Harden, where I understand Mr. Henshawe is now staying, and there my responsibility will cease."

"Not to Crown-Harden!" exclaimed Cecil, drawing back — "anywhere but there."

"My dear Sir, I cannot take the responsibility of keeping you here—I dare not. I am really too ill to do anything at all; but I cannot get farther than Crown-Harden. I cannot; it is a physical impossibility—I cannot accompany you all the way to Deerham."

Cecil said no more, though his whole soul revolted from the miserable necessity. To be brought back almost as a felon to his own old home—to have to encounter Rosamond perhaps, and undoubtedly Stephen Granville and Orlando Henshawe, who he felt sure would not lose the opportunity of wounding his feelings by their presence—was what he least knew how to

bear ; and he felt bitterly enough what it was to be no longer his own master.

“ No matter,” he repeated to himself, “ it cannot last long.”

During that almost silent drive, he endured more pain than he had ever imagined it was possible to feel.

“ Can anything be worse than this ?” he thought to himself, “ if I am not acquitted, if I should be condemned when I stand in the dock with all those frowning eyes upon me, shall I feel worse than now and afterwards ?”

Horrible images passed before him, convicts with their close cropped hair, their dress, their hideous mode of life, the labour, the sorrow, the ineffaceable disgrace, the ever returning days of misery—then Blanche distracted, despairing, all her brave spirit broken down ; Rosamond, her gentle kindness spent in vain !

He looked with wonder-stricken eyes at the brightening heavens, it seemed strange

to see the glorious sun rise as ever from beneath his air-woven tapestry of scarlet and gold, touching with joyous light the purple hills, to hear the larks carolling among the morning clouds as they rolled off, to see the earth opening afresh all her beauties to the gladdening light, and to feel within his soul the darkness as of a dungeon.

Poor Cecil had had very little experience of life, and this was a new, a strange, and a bitter one !

As he entered the familiar gates and drove up the formal avenue, his heart beat so hard that he could scarcely draw his breath, but he got down and stood on the hall steps without speaking a single word.

The house had not been long astir, but the family were already seated at a very early breakfast. By some means it had been rumoured that Cecil Conway had been seen in the neighbourhood ; Mr. Henshawe, senior, had slept at Crown-Harden that

night, and Rosamond, far too anxious to sleep, had also got up and was there, determined to hear and know whatever was passing.

Benson opened the door but, on seeing Cecil, lost his presence of mind, uttered a loud exclamation and hurried back into the hall. Stephen Granville, always on the alert, jumped up and came to the front door.

"Oh, Mr. Townsend!" he cried out, "and Mr. Cecil Conway, welcome home!" And he threw open the dining-room door and ushered them in.

Regardless of appearances, of those who were present, of everything else in the world, Rosamond flew to Cecil.

"Oh, dearest Cecil!" she cried, and drooping her head on his arm, she burst into tears.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Rosamond," said Granville, roughly, "why don't

you go to your room? what an ass you are!"

Cecil bent tenderly over her.

"Dearest!" he whispered, "we are among enemies, try to be calm."

"I will," she said, looking up in his face, "I will not grieve you, Cecil; but come and sit by me," and drawing him to her side, the two cousins sat down next to each other.

"Mr. Henshawe," said Mr. Townsend, "I have had a most unwelcome duty to perform, but Mr. Conway came to me and delivered himself up of his own free will. I am really ill myself, and knew no better course to take than to bring him here, where I am sure every kindness and civility that is possible will be shown him. I do not feel obliged to do more in the matter."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Townsend," replied the lawyer, "may not I ask you to—to—"

"Thank you," was the answer, "if you would give me leave to retire, if you have a disengaged bed-room, I should be much obliged. I took the liberty of ordering my carriage to be sent here."

"Most assuredly."

And Mrs. Benson was summoned to show the invalid gentleman into a bed-room, where he took off his great-coat and threw himself on the bed, while Mrs. Benson with tearful eyes brought him up tea and whatever he required.

"My dear Miss Granville," said Mr. Henshawe, much distressed, "would it not be better if you went upstairs? Better for yourself I mean?"

"No," said Rosamond, who had now recovered her self-possession, "I will not leave Cecil until I am obliged. I am his only friend here, and I will prove myself a true one."

And she turned to Cecil with a smile, angelic in its goodness.

Mr. Henshawe gravely sat down to write a note to be despatched to the police-inspector at Deerham, while Stephen Granville stared at Cecil, turning aside from time to time with an insulting smile, not daring in words to express his malignant triumph, which Cecil appeared to take no notice of, though he saw it.

Rosamond brought him a cup of tea, and entreated him to have some breakfast. Cecil drank the tea and managed to swallow something, and as he was thus engaged Henry Villeroy was ushered in. He went straight up to Cecil, and shook him warmly by the hand.

"Well, Cecil," he said cheerfully, "I wish you had gone with us, but we will have a trip together before the Summer is over."

And drawing up a chair he seated himself close opposite to Rosamond and Cecil, and turning his back to the rest of the party, conversed with them in a low voice.

"You must make me of use," he said, "send me anywhere, do with me what you will."

"Blanche," began Conway, and could not get out another word.

"I was going to propose," said Villeroy, "to go to your sister, and bring her either here, or"

"Yes," said Cecil quietly, "or to Deerham, perhaps she will prefer being near."

"You authorize me," said Villeroy, "to do all in my power to protect her?"

"Yes, indeed, since you are so kind," answered Cecil, "you and Rosamond are true friends, and it will be a comfort to remember it when I perhaps shall have little other."

"Never doubt—never fear," said Villeroy, "I can not, will not believe that in England an innocent man can be accounted guilty. This is bad—but I feel confident it is the worst, and you show all the courage that I expected you would,

and more self-command, dear old fellow. I am proud of my friend."

Cecil changed colour and turned away. Villeroy saw that he could not bear more and retain his composure, so he quickly continued in his former cheerful every-day tone.

"Is there anything else I can do? tell me, Miss Granville, for I trust entirely in you."

"I know of nothing," said she, "but shall I write one line to Blanche?" and she looked appealingly towards her cousin.

"Do," he said.

And Rosamond flew to the table Mr. Henshawe had just left, and wrote a few hurried lines.

"Dear Blanche,

"Your brother has given me leave to send you a line—my dearest cousin, in this hour of deep sorrow we must unite to comfort and assist dear Cecil. All my

heart is in this wish—I have no other in the whole world. Will you come here to Crown-Harden? Oh! if you will, I could serve you on my knees! May you be supported.

“Your most unhappy cousin,

“ROSAMOND.”

She gave it to Villeroy without showing it to Cecil.

“You had better go at once,” said Conway, “if she heard it unprepared it would be too great a shock.”

“I will,” answered Villeroy, “but no trains start for an hour, let me stay till then.”

In less than half an hour, however, a fly drove up, with a respectable man inside, whose uniform at once proclaimed his duties. Mr. Henshawe came up to Cecil.

“Mr. Conway,” he said, “believe me I deeply regret having to request you”

"I understand," said Cecil, rising immediately, "Rosamond, good-bye."

He pressed her hand fervently, she sank back in her chair, while Villoroy, almost as pale as Cecil, accompanied him to the door, and stood by the side of the carriage till it drove off, when he went back into the room. At this moment even Stephen Granville looked grave.

"I will go up-stairs now," Rosamond said faintly. Villoroy gave her his arm, and gently supported her to her door, for she was scarcely able to stand. Mrs. Benson came up from the other end of the corridor, her tears falling fast, and received Rosamond half lifeless in her arms.

As soon as the door was shut, Rosamond threw herself on the floor.

"Do lie on the bed, my dear, do now," entreated Mrs. Benson.

"No, no, no," said Rosamond, "here." Mrs. Benson lifted her head, and put a

pillow under it, and there the poor girl lay and would not be comforted. Her only words were,—

“Let no one in. I will not see any one.”

Villeroy was still in ignorance of the place where Blanche now was staying. He had not inquired of Cecil, for he saw that to name her even was agony to him, and Rosamond was far more unfit than he to give him the information he needed. After some hesitation he felt himself obliged to ask for Mrs. Benson; he accordingly went to Rosamond's door, and tapping softly said he wished to speak to Mrs. Benson.

Rosamond on hearing some one at her door, started up wildly. “Something has happened, open the door, see what it is.”

Villeroy and the housekeeper had a short conference, and the latter, returning to the room, told Rosamond what he had asked.

"Near Holland Abbey, his uncle's place, under the name of Crawford, Forest Lodge," she said, repeating mechanically the words imprinted on her memory.

On hearing them Villeroy started; he felt certain that his friend had taken the situation he had mentioned, and he scarcely knew how to endure the idea of Blanche and Cecil having submitted to such humiliation. He walked hastily a few paces then stopped short; alas! it mattered little now, for far deeper grief and graver sorrows were before her, and it was he who was to bring them to her knowledge. He longed to clasp her in his arms and shield her from the world and all that was in it.

CHAPTER V.

VILLEROY arrived at Holland Abbey, greatly to the surprise of his uncle, for he seldom visited him, and never unannounced and uninvited.

"What's the matter?" inquired Sir Philip; "is your mother ill?"

"No," Villeroy answered, "but my dearest friend is in great trouble."

"And pray who may your dearest friend be?" asked Sir Philip satirically.

"Cecil Conway," was the reply.

"What! the fellow who stole the will?"

"Who is falsely accused of so doing," said Villeroy.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed his uncle contemptuously; "but what do you post down here for?"

"To see Blanche Conway. Heaven grant she may have heard nothing."

"She knows nothing about it; but what should you see her for? I don't see what business it is of yours."

"Then I will tell you, my dear uncle: because I love her."

"Fiddlestick! love! What's the use? you can do her nothing but mischief."

"If she will accept me, I will marry her to-morrow," said Villeroy impetuously.

"Marry! you're mad, boy; don't talk such nonsense to me."

"I mean to do it," said Villeroy.

"You had better not. I know the whole case. The man will be convicted—so much I can tell you; penal servitude for life—a felon, a convict, a galley-slave—nothing better—Henry Villeroy's brother-in-law! a convict's sister his bride!"

"Yes," said Villeroy, "and every shilling I possess would I spend in his service if it could save him."

"Damon and Pythias!" shouted Sir Philip, with a roar of laughter; "stage rant—all stage rant, I say."

"Only that it is the simple truth," said Villeroy.

"Then hear a little more simple truth, simpleton that you are. You expect my money—I know it very well—and would have had it too; but it is not for the benefit of a felon's sister."

"Is it possible," said Villeroy sternly, "that you can suppose that loss of money would deter me, when even dishonour cannot? I do not blind myself; it is dishonour to my name, though the love of Blanche would be an honour to me; and if I can win it, so I shall esteem it."

"Mad—young—foolish—Don Quixotical! What do you think your mother will say?"

"She will not like it, but I cannot help that. I think she loves me well enough to forgive it. But listen. They are in the depths of grief and humiliation, while innocent of all that is imputed to them. I love Blanche—I long have loved her—and this is the time to prove my faith. Cannot you see—cannot you feel—that a poltroon might desert her now, but a man of honour would love her all the more. As her husband, I should comfort, support, raise, assist her; in any other way I can do nothing."

"Sacrificing yourself and all your family for a pretty face!" grumbled Sir Philip more feebly.

"Mine is a true love," answered Ville-roy; "it has stood one or two more severe shocks than this. More severe, do I say? To one who has a spark of manly feeling this great sorrow of hers would endear her a thousand times more;" and he turned hastily away and walked up to the window.

Sir Philip Holland looked after him in silence. Was he able to feel that a noble heart was greater than a proud one!

In any case he saw that no persuasions could change him.

"I know my way to the Lodge," said Villeroy, looking round. "Excuse me if I leave you so soon. I dread lest, by any cruel indiscretion, she should hear the sad news before I see her."

"Well," said Sir Philip, "I dine at half-past seven. You will not have much time."

"If I am late, pray excuse me. I do not care about dinner."

"Pray do you care about living at all?" shouted Sir Philip.

"Not much, if I fail in this," said Villeroy.

"Pish! Ague, typhus, scarlet fever not so bad as your disease. Well, your cure's at hand. If she takes you, your illness will soon be over. If you like," he added,

following Villeroy to the door, and shouting after him, "you may bring your doll, your idol, your waxen image here. I won't insult her."

Then after his nephew had left the house, he comforted himself by calling him fool, dolt, idiot, and a few worse words still.

On arriving at the Lodge Villeroy was shown straight into the small cottage room where Blanche sat writing.

She started up, looking anxiously at him.

"You have bad news!" she exclaimed.

"Is my brother ill?"

"He is not ill," said Villeroy, taking her hand.

"Is he alive?" she asked, pale as death.

"Yes, and in good health," he replied.

"But there is something," she said, sitting down. "Sit down, Mr. Villeroy. Tell me—the worst will be better than suspense. Not ill? What can it be?"

"I hardly know how to explain the unhappy circumstances that have brought trouble on him," he said

"What do you mean—some debt—an arrest?" asked Blanche.

"Something of that nature," said Ville-roy, reluctantly; "but not for debt."

"Arrested, and not for debt!" she exclaimed; "but how is that possible? What can it be? Pray, Mr. Villeroy, do not fear to tell me the worst, since he lives and is well. I am not very susceptible. I see it is something serious, and that you are kindly unwilling to give me pain."

"Blanche," he said, with emotion, "what I feel towards you is something far stronger than kindness. It is love the most sincere. I cannot deny that your brother is in a difficulty, that you will suffer sorrow. Would to heaven that you would give me the right to comfort and stand by you. I well know that this is not the time to speak of myself, when all

your feelings are engrossed by thoughts of your brother. It may seem almost like selfishness, but it is not."

"No, dear Mr. Villeroy," Blanche replied, "it is most generous, situated as we are—humbled, disinherited, perhaps worse. But tell me of my brother. I cannot think of myself while in anxiety about him. What is it?"

Villeroy perceived that Blanche little foresaw the greatness of the misery before her. It was hard for him to have to unfold the terrible truth.

"You know that your uncle's will was in the keeping of Miss Granville?"

"Yes," she answered.

"In an antique cabinet, locked by a key of peculiar shape. The will was there safe a fortnight ago. Since then the key has not been out of Miss Granville's possession, except once when Cecil took some letters out of that cabinet. An hour later the will had disappeared, and Cecil had

hastily left the house—in reality to avoid a meeting with Stephen Granville, but the disappearance was unfavourable. Measures were taken against him, but he could nowhere be found. Miss Granville had been able to find him shelter and concealment for a day or two, but last night he gave himself up.”

“Of what do they accuse him?” exclaimed Blanche.

“Of abstracting the will,” Villeroy answered.

“Monstrous! ridiculous! no one would credit it for a moment,” said Blanche, haughtily.

“No friend of his would,” said Villeroy.

“Nor any other person!” she asserted. “Cecil Conway steal a will! absurd, an invention of his enemies! what does he mean to do?”

Villeroy looked down, how was it possible to tell her that he was now in prison on the charge? At last he said,

"Miss Granville is in deep distress on his account; I have a letter to you from her. You may believe in her sincerity, I assure you, she earnestly prays you to go to her at Crown-Harden."

"Is Cecil there?" she inquired.

"You would be near him there," Villeroy said, in agitation.

"Do you mean? am I to understand that Cecil . . . is he in prison? speak!"

"He is," faltered Villeroy.

"In prison!" And with a cry of anguish she sprang up with her arms raised towards heaven, then fell back on her chair, almost insensible. Villeroy approached her. "Let me go to him! I must be with him! Oh, wretched that we are!"

"Dearest Miss Conway, dearest Blanche! summon your courage! he is so calm, so undaunted, if you could see him it would compose your mind—and you shall see him. I came to escort you."

She looked up wildly at him.

“What is the worst that can befall him? tell me, for that worst will come. We are outcasts and rejected; there is no mercy for us.”

“You will find it is not so,” he said, gently, “will not you read Miss Granville’s letter?”

“Not now,” said Blanche, “I cannot—some other time.”

“Do, I beseech you,” said Villeroy, who thought that even reading that might, in some slight degree, assuage her first agony. She took it and put it aside.

“I cannot care about that or anything now.”

But it relates to this; pray look at it,” he urged.

Blanche opened it, and brushing away her blinding tears, with difficulty made it out.

“You will go to Crown-Harden, will you not?” he asked.

“Yes, if it is best; but I must be near

near—close to him. Can I go to-night?"

"Not to-night," said Villeroy, "but the first thing to-morrow morning; and you will look on me as your affianced husband, Blanche?"

"Oh! no, no, I would never so disgrace you; no, do not speak of it. I could not think of such things now. Where is he? at Deerham?"

"Yes," replied Villeroy, "I parted from him at Crown-Harden. Every one was anxious to be kind to him."

"Was Stephen there?" she inquired.

"Yes," said Villeroy, "but he did not speak a word."

"And Orlando Henshawe?"

"No, only old Mr. Henshawe."

"Rosamond was sorry?" she asked.

"She was half broken-hearted"

"Poor Rosamond! poor Cecil! and I?"

"Shall I tell the good woman here to put up your things?" Villeroy said.

"Yes," answered Blanche, "and Cecil's as well. Oh! Mr. Villeroy! this is wretched for you! I will not detain you here."

"Let me stay a little while," begged Villeroy, and knowing that it would be unendurable to her to hear of aught else but what concerned Cecil, he remained talking to her, trying to put all in the most hopeful light, until she was somewhat composed. Then she became so utterly exhausted, so wan and so weak that he persuaded her to go up and retire to rest, for he told her she would have a very fatiguing day to-morrow.

He stayed below till Mrs. Brewster came down, saying she was in bed, but in a bad way, poor dear Miss!

She wept herself to sleep, extreme lassitude having made it impossible for her to

bear more, and Villeroy returned sorrowfully to Holland Abbey.

The butler informed him that his master wished Mr. Villeroy to go into the dining-room to have some dinner, and begged him to be so good afterwards as to join him in the drawing-room, which he did.

Sir Philip accosted him with, "Well, Sir, are you accepted?"

"No," said Villeroy.

"Ah!" laughed Sir Philip, "a rejected swain! a disappointed lover! indeed I pity you! melancholy indeed," and he laughed aloud, while Villeroy sat grave and unmoved. "If you intend self-destruction, pray wait till you leave my house."

"I am grieved it is true," said Villeroy, "but it is for her sorrow, not for myself. Yours is not a very compassionate heart, Sir Philip, but I think even you would have felt for her."



"What does the poor little fool want to do?" asked Sir Philip.

"She is going off to-morrow early to her brother at Deerham," answered Villeroy.

"Going to mix herself up with such an awkward business—she had much better keep out of the way, clear of it all," Sir Philip remarked.

"You cannot suppose she would forsake him at such a time!" Villeroy exclaimed.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, I forgot. I was actually making use of common sense, a great mistake. No wonder you are offended."

"If you were in trouble, would you expect your friend sedulously to avoid you?" said Villeroy.

"Yes," replied Sir Philip, "but I have not a friend."

"I should imagine not, if those are your opinions."

"Quite clever! Pray has *your* beloved friend got Counsel? I should imagine not, as he is as poor as a rat."

"As soon as I have escorted Miss Conway to Crown-Harden, I intend to go up to town and secure the best," said Villeroy.

"For once you show a gleam of something approaching to reason; that is if you really want to get the fellow off, which I suppose I am to understand you do! Eh?"

"Yes, of course," Villeroy answered.

"It does not signify a hang," resumed Sir Philip, "whether he did it or not, good Counsel is the only thing."

"You think so," said his nephew. "I do not. But I quite agree with you as to the necessity of an able lawyer."

"Those gentlemen cost a pretty sum, let me tell you."

"What of that?" said Villeroy.

"Oh, you mean to pay the piper! Poor dupe!"

"His friends will," replied Villeroy.

"No, they won't," said Sir Philip fiercely, "for I shall pay it myself. He is my servant."

"Dearest Uncle!" began Villeroy.

"Oh, none of that, thank you, or I will fee the other side, though I rather wish him to get off myself. Good night, Henry Villeroy."

Villeroy pressed his old uncle's hand.

"I shall not see you to-morrow," he said.

"Not unless you stay till ten at breakfast," said his uncle.

"Good-night, and thank you."

"Now that I can understand," Sir Philip remarked, "good-night, poor young man."

CHAPTER VI.

DURING the whole of the journey back to Crown-Harden, Blanche scarcely exchanged a dozen words with her companion; she was too ill to speak or to listen, and on reaching her destination was in such a state of fever and exhaustion that she was conveyed to her room and went to bed at once.

Rosamond and Mrs. Benson watched her through the night by turns, for towards twelve o'clock she became delirious, talking hurriedly in a low voice of Cecil, Stephen Granville, and above all of her uncle. Every kind of horror seemed to

encircle her, except the one that had reality.

Rosamond herself was so wearied out, that she slept for an hour or two between one and three o'clock. About five Mrs. Benson came in and requested Rosamond to go and rest.

She went to her room and threw open her window. It was the short still time before sunrise ; the mild air scented with mignonette and early roses refreshed her ; the softened grey light, after the yellow dull glare of the night-lamp, rested her eyes and relieved her aching head. Instead of going to bed therefore, where she was sure she could not have slept, she wrapped a shawl round her and went down to compose herself by taking a turn in the quiet garden.

She felt the influence of the sweet and gentle hour ; her throbbing temples were cooled ; a soft hope, she knew not from whence, arose in her heart ; she reflected

that it was not chance or inexorable fate that ruled the destinies of those she loved, but the great Governor of all, whose mercy was equal to his power. She was seated on one of the garden benches occupied by these thoughts, when a desire seized her to wander up towards the tower.

It looked dark and gloomy beneath the trees, and that walk was not calculated to suggest consolation or peace. There she had last seen Cecil, but it was a mournful recollection, which she knew it would be wiser not to recall, but a kind of fascination drew her onwards. The grass on the narrow path was wet with the night dew, and it was folly to persevere, yet she went on.

The tower rose grim and dark before her; she did not enter but still pursued the winding, ascending path that Cecil had last trod. Unconsciously she was led on farther than she had intended, till she

was beneath the high, broken cliff, with its few ragged bushes lodged here and there in crevices in its precipitous sides. A red glow from the rising sun painted with a rosy tinge the sandstone rocks, while a clear green light quivered amid the trees that were lately so black and colourless. Then the large crimson sun shot up above the flat horizon below her, and all was transformed into a new life ; a swift breeze made music among the leaves ; the birds woke fully up, singing and fluttering ; the night had passed away—day had come.

Rosamond, with her large capacity for participating in the joys of nature, looked around her with a full heart, when a sight she beheld a few steps in front of her gave a sudden check to her feelings, while a cold thrill ran through her.

What was it that reflected the sunrise glow in a pool of deep purple with a vermillion shimmer on its surface, lying there

in a small hollow in the stone—a glaring witness, though a silent one?

With a face chill as ice, a deadly paleness on her features, a cramp of horror seizing her heart, she stepped forward and looked down. Yes, it was blood, of which drops and trails were before and around her. Glancing rapidly round, she soon beheld the cause. There, with outstretched arms—his head lying buried in the long, rank grass and the gorse-bushes—lay in a slanting direction across the path the body of a man.

She stared in motionless terror, but even then mercy and pity prompted her, all shuddering as she was, to advance one step nearer to see if he still breathed. One hand doubled closely, as if in a last agony, was within her reach. In shrinking terror she barely touched it; no marble could be so cold—it was death.

Excitement leant her strength. She hastened back to the house, where the

servants were already up, and, trembling from head to foot, white as snow and almost as cold, scarcely able to articulate the words, she told the housekeeper and old Benson that a dead man lay outside.

"But hush!" she said, "do not let Miss Conway hear anything."

Benson quietly called the man-servant and one of the grooms. They took a light sofa of cane-work out of the inner hall, and Rosamond, leaning on Benson's arm, led them up to the place.

"Good heavens!" cried Benson, raising the wretched form, "it is Mr. Orlando Henshawe."

Rosamond was seated on the bank, some little distance off with averted head.

"Look here, Sir," said the groom, "he has something in his hand."

"Leave it alone. Just as we find him, carry him in."

One or two other men, who had followed at a little distance, now stole quietly up.

"Here is a handkerchief all over blood."

"Put it on the sofa by his side," said old Benson, scarcely able to bear the sickening sight.

"You men carry him carefully into the little parlour next to the house-keeper's room, and mind that nothing is touched. I will follow you with Miss Granville in a few minutes."

Rosamond had nearly fainted away, and it was more than half an hour before she was able slowly to retrace her steps homeward, pausing and resting to recover herself from time to time.

One or two policemen, under the direction of the Inspector, were already in the hall, sent for at the first alarm, no one knew by whom, but all was silent and still as the grave.

Every precaution was taken neither to alarm Blanche nor poor old Mr. Hen-

shawe, who had slept that night at Crown-Harden.

About an hour later, Mr. Townsend, the same to whom Cecil had delivered himself up, made his appearance, tolerably recovered from his illness. He was at his brother's, Sir Charles Townsend, and Mrs. Benson, having been told that a magistrate ought to be sent for, had despatched a carriage for him.

On examination, a terrible wound was found on one side of the unhappy man's head; an artery had burst, the bones of the skull were fractured, and the loss of blood had been excessive. A heavy bludgeon lay by his side, and tightly grasped in his hand was a small pocket-book of Russia leather, bound and clasped with gold; the Inspector turned it about, and handed it to the magistrate, next to whom stood Mrs. Benson.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the poor woman, "why that's Master Cecil's!"

There could be no doubt of it; his initials were engraved on a small shield inside, and within were letters addressed to him, as well as a few cards with his name.

Moreover, on examining the handkerchief which was saturated with blood, that was also found to be his. On being shown it, Mr. Townsend shook his head but made no observation.

"There seems no doubt, Sir," said the Inspector, "that Mr. Cecil Conway had been all the time concealed in the tower. Mr. Stephen Granville told me he had his suspicions of the fact, the very evening before he was taken; and it appears to have been undoubtedly the case. I can explain my reasons for thinking so more fully hereafter. I trust that in making his escape there was no collision between him and the unfor-

fortunate man. There was always a great amount of ill-feeling between them—a pity that Mr. Orlando made himself so officious in the business.”

“It is strange, however,” said Mr. Townsend, “that there is no sign whatever of the bludgeon having been used, there is not one drop of blood on it.”

“That is curious, Sir,” said the officer, and they both carefully examined it.

“Of course, Sir,” said the Inspector, “it is not my place to offer any opinion whatever. I have merely to state exactly what I saw.”

“Undoubtedly,” said Mr. Townsend, “and you must be very careful to make no observations, or comments whatever.”

So saying, Mr. Townsend entered the housekeeper’s room, and inquired whether

Mr. Henshawe, senior, knew of the terrible calamity.

"My husband has just been with him, Sir," said Mrs. Benson. "He is greatly shocked and distressed, poor old gentleman. He will leave to-day for his own house at Deerham. He has long been unfit for business, poor gentleman, or he would not have left matters all unsettled so long. A pity he had not given it up before; but I'm sorry for him, I'm sure. We don't mean to let Miss Conway know anything about it a present. She is much too ill to move from her bed; and fortunately the part of the house where she is, is so separated from this that neither she nor poor Miss Rosamond need be troubled more."

"Quite right," said Mr. Townsend. "All can be done quietly, if you take care that no gossip goes into the ladies' rooms."

"I'll take care, Sir. We expect Mr.

Villeroy soon ; he will be of great use. I shall be glad when he comes."

"Of course there must be an inquest," said Mr. Townsend. "I wish it could take place at Deerham. The body might be removed thither."

On the authority of Mr. Townsend this was done at once ; and an hour before poor old Mr. Henshawe took his departure from Crown-Harden the remains of his son were conveyed to the hotel at Deerham.

It is not necessary to give an account of the proceedings at the inquest, where it was considered that sufficient suspicion fell on Cecil Conway to warrant farther investigations.

Stephen Granville was present at the inquest ; even he was awed into silence. The fearful aspect of his former companion struck a new sense of dread into his hard heart. He returned to Crown-Harden in the evening, gloomy and sullen.

Though all was cautiously withheld from the knowledge of Rosamond, yet an instinct warned her that in the awful fate of Orlando Henshawe might lurk some danger to Cecil. How could those fearful blows have been inflicted? Who could have any interest in murdering the wretched man? And with whom, or under what circumstances could the death-struggle have taken place?

She was confident as ever of her cousin's perfect innocence, but could it be proved?

Where was the will—who was the murderer? Was there some secret, unguessed enemy prowling around them, who had mysteriously brought death and agony into their quiet home?

The idea was horrible. A wild, feverish restlessness beset her. She had dosed uneasily for a short time as she lay on her bed, where her maid had placed her, but she soon woke up, and thought and won-

dered, and mused till all seemed unreal and uncertain as a frightful nightmare. At last, finding it impossible to endure the torture of enforced stillness any longer, she arose and went down-stairs. They had left her, hoping she was asleep and would have a good rest.

She found Villeroy in the large empty drawing-room. Mrs. Benson, who had been giving him an account of Blanche and answering his inquiries, had just left him. Rosamond advanced towards him, feeling it a relief to her misery to see him there.

"They tell me Blanche is better," he said.

Rosamond turned her large woe-begone eyes silently on him.

"I have seen Cecil to-day," he said gently.

"Will this horrible death—will it affect him?" she asked tremulously.

"I scarcely know," said Villeroy.

"Has he heard of it? Does he think it may injure him?" she inquired.

"I fear he does," answered Villeroy, "but he shows much more strength of character than one could have expected. Such a gay, thoughtless fellow as he was."

"Dear, dear Cecil," said Rosamond, weeping. "Oh, Mr. Villeroy! I wish so much to see him—I must! may I not?"

"As for etiquette," replied Villeroy, "on such an occasion who would think of it?"

"Oh, no," said Rosamond, "all that is nothing; but can I? Am I allowed? Can you take me?"

"Certainly," Villeroy answered. "I mean to visit him every day if I can, and you may go with me whenever you please."

"Thank you," she said; and after some pause continued, "I have a wish

that perhaps you will oppose, but it is a strong one."

"Tell it me, dear Rosamond," he said, "I never can oppose a wish of yours."

"I want to go to the place where that unhappy man was found."

Villeroy was staggered; it was the last spot he thought that she would desire to visit.

"It will not be dark for an hour or two," she resumed; "will you take me there now?"

"The place has been thoroughly examined," objected Villeroy, "it will only shock you."

"Still I wish it," pleaded Rosamond, "I so very much wish it."

Villeroy had always thought Rosamond a somewhat strange girl, but now more than ever. He had already discovered that, like many gentle quiet people, she had a very strong will, and seldom liked to give up what she had set her mind on,

but this might, he imagined, be a natural-trait of the sex. In this case, however, her determination caused him some surprise; he would have supposed it the spot which of all others she would have shrunk from and avoided, for it was evident she had not recovered the shock to her nerves. She trembled, at the least sound she started violently, her eyes were wild and hollow, and there was an involuntary twitching movement about her lips. He gazed on her in speechless amazement.

"Yes," she said, "I dread it—it is horrid, but I must—I feel it a necessity to go. You will not let me go alone?"

"No, indeed," Villeroy answered.

"Let Benson come too," she said, "let him follow."

Villeroy accompanied her down-stairs, leaving orders for Benson to come after them, and he and Rosamond again took their way along the narrow green path that had ever been so solitary, but latterly

had been trod by so many rough feet, and had borne so dismal a burden. It seemed as if unsympathising nature for once mourned with those who mourned. Heavy sullen clouds hung motionless above, one or two large rain drops fell at intervals, almost like tears. The air was oppressive, as if clogged with foul exhalations, one could almost fancy it bore the faint scent of death.

Neither spoke one single word ; at last they reached the place.

“ Look about, everywhere,” said Rosamond, “ try to find some sign.”

At her request Villeroy, as well as herself, searched all around—uselessly as he believed. Old Benson came up by-and-by, and joined them.

The poor old man had really feared the lonely walk, overhung with trees, more than ever gloomy this dark evening, haunted as it was by such fearful recollections, and had brought with him a sharp

boy of fourteen, a *protégé* of the old butler's who sometimes acted as page, but now wore his usual boy's dress.

"Search about, Benson," said Rosamond eagerly.

Villeroy looked at her almost in alarm; was she delirious, was she mad? had grief, fatigue, and terror overturned the balance of her brain?

"Oh, Sandy!" she exclaimed, turning to the boy. "Cannot you find something?—something to speak for him?"

The boy looked at her in earnest inquiry a minute, then her meaning seemed at once to strike him, he plunged into the bushes, beating about in every direction. There they remained, and continued their hopeless, fruitless search for what appeared to Villeroy an endless length of time.

Suddenly Rosamond gave a start, and caught hold of Villeroy's arm.

“Did you not hear? Hark!” she said, “listen.”

Villeroy gazed in alarm at her pale face, she was—she must be mad. She held up one hand intent, then he heard a distant call; Benson also came forward.

“The boy is calling, I think, Sir.”

“Come on, come on,” said Rosamond, in violent agitation, a scarlet flush flying to her cheeks, her eyes sparkling, “did not I tell you so? come on.”

They turned some steps backward towards the tower; a hurried rushing was heard through the bushes of some one rapidly descending the steep wooded slope, and soon Sandy ran panting and breathless down to them. He could not speak, but pointed eagerly upwards.

“What is it, my boy? what have you seen?” asked Villeroy.

“There it is,” he panted, “that will save him, Ma’am.”

"Pray speak out, what do you mean?" inquired Villeroy.

"There," answered the boy, "Orlando Henshawe fell down the crag; there hangs his watch and chain dangling to a branch half way down—must have caught him as he fell."

"Go, Mr. Villeroy," exclaimed Rosamond, "bring witnesses—bring that man, that he may see it as it is. Go; I will stay here."

"I cannot leave you here, Rosamond, in this state," said Villeroy.

"Yes, yes, yes, if you would have me live. Go, fetch them, let them see it—it may fall—it may be removed—they may say it is a plot—they may still say that man's blood is on his hands."

"No, Ma'am," said the boy, "they can't say that, it cannot be removed, no one can reach it. I could not. It is a wild brier, a sort of thorn-bush. There is not room for a dog to stand there."

"Go," repeated Rosamond, "I will stay here, I will. I will keep watch. It will get dark. Mr. Villeroy, go as I bid you."

"I will stay with Miss Granville," said Benson, "perhaps Sandy might stay with us."

"Yes," assented Villeroy, and ran at full speed down towards the house, anxious to lose no time. Rosamond sat on the bank near the path, not speaking, but only casting anxious looks towards the house. Benson sat a little way behind her, and Sandy walked impatiently up and down, looking out for the arrival of the persons who were to verify the discovery he had made.

It happened fortunately that the Inspector, who had left a policeman at Crown-Harden, had come over to see if anything more had been found, and to learn generally what was going on.

He immediately accompanied Mr. Vil-

leroy up to the shrubbery-walk, listening to the manner in which the discovery of the watch had been made. Sandy ran down to meet them when he heard them approaching.

"We have yet to see," said the Inspector, "whether the watch, if there, really belonged to Mr. Orlando Henshawe."

"If it does, it is, I imagine, conclusive that his death was accidental," said Villeroy.

"A strong presumption that it was so certainly," said the Inspector, looking at Rosamond, for they had now reached the spot where she sat. "Unless," he added, "there should be any reason to suspect that he had been flung down the cliff by some person above."

"Not by Mr. Conway," said Rosamond, "I persuaded him to remain in the tower a day or two, hoping the will would be found, and he left it by this path, as Mr. Villeroy also can testify."

The Inspector only bowed, he was not displeased to find that his surmise was correct as to Cecil's place of concealment.

"I wish," he said, "it was not so late in the evening."

"I'll take you where you can see it as plain as my hat," said Sandy. "I caught a glimmer of something that looked very queer from below as I was scrambling about among the stones and bushes. 'That's an odd sort of fruit to hang on a bough,' I says to myself, and I climbed up to where I got a good sight of it; so can you, Sir, if you come this way. Please, Sir, who will the watch belong to?" added Sandy, who, under the most adverse circumstances, always kept a sharp look-out for his own interests.

"If we can't give you that watch, you shall have another," said Villeroy.

He and Sandy clambered up, followed at some distance by the Inspector, who, being a stout man, was not so agile as his com-

panions, to a spot from whence they could see distinctly above them the gold watch of Orlando Henshawe swaying to and fro as the wind moved the long, waving branch of wild rose to which was securely attached the double gold chain that he used as a watch-guard, being strongly entangled in a forked twig of the bough. The rays of the setting sun caught it, and from where they now stood it glimmered against the dark back-ground like a star.

“If we could get to the top of the cliff, we should probably see marks at the place where he fell,” said the Inspector.

“That’s easily done,” said Sandy; “we must clamber back a bit towards the tower and there we can get up if we look sharp.”

The officer did not much enjoy the prospect of the rugged and dangerous way, but was too spirited to yield to the dictates of prudence, and at the imminent risk of breaking his neck, as he always explained when he told the story afterwards, they all

three scrambled to the top of the almost precipitous range.

They walked along until they arrived just above the crevice where grew the brier. There they beheld, shuddering, clear proof of the wretched man's last struggle.

An elder-bush that grew some way below the edge of the precipice was torn and partly dragged away by the roots; his convulsed hands had clutched it in the agony of a momentary suspense, and it was evident that when this frail support gave way, part of his dress, as he was falling, got entangled in the tough boughs of the brier, for they saw also a shred of white linen caught in near neighbourhood to the watch.

"This place must be guarded," said the officer; "to-morrow we must find means to get possession of the watch and the scrap of linen. I will send one of my men up here, he shall stay all night; in the

morning we can let down a man by a rope."

"Then," said Villeroy, "if you will wait here, I will only go for the young lady, and send your policeman up to you."

"Thank you, Sir," said the Inspector. "There's one thing puzzles me, how could he have got hold of Mr. Conway's pocket-book and his handkerchief?"

"That is a mystery," answered Villeroy. "I will be here early in the morning. When shall you come?"

"At seven, Sir."

"Very well," and Villeroy hastened down to Rosamond.

"Is it so?" she asked.

"Yes," Villeroy replied, "and of this Cecil is acquitted beyond a doubt in the eyes of all—it is an omen of good."

He gave Rosamond his arm, and half carried her down to the house. He

promised to call at Crown-Harden as soon as the watch was recovered, tell her the result, and escort her to Deerham, if she so wished it, to visit Cecil. It was too late to see him, or communicate with him that night, much as Villeroy regretted having to leave him in ignorance of what had occurred; for though Cecil had said little on hearing the fate of Orlando Henshawe, he had felt that the clouds were darkening above his head.

However, though Villeroy was unable to relieve his mind on this point that same evening, he wrote a note to him rehearsing all that had taken place, and entrusted it to the proper authority at the prison, who promised that it should be conveyed to him the first thing on the following morning.

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE seven, Villeroy was on the edge of the cliffs above the shrubby path, where a considerable number of persons had already assembled, among them Mr. Bissett, the rival lawyer to Mr. Henshawe at Deerham, and Mr. Warren, the principal medical man of the place.

The first step taken was to lower a man with a chain round his waist, and a stout cable secured well above, to recover the watch and the scrap of linen.

This was successfully accomplished,

and the man, with only a few slight bruises from jutting points of rock, safely landed again on *terra firma*.

"Ah!" said Mr. Warren, "that is the poor fellow's watch, I know it well—a chronometer of Dent's; cost a good sum of money, too. There will be no difficulty in identifying that. And the piece of linen, too. I noticed a slit in the shirt-sleeve, where no doubt that will fit in. He was no doubt reaching over, probably spying some object below."

"I suppose," suggested some one, "he was not flung over?"

"Impossible," said Mr. Bissett.

"No," said the Inspector, "there would be some sign of a struggle. The soil is light and sandy; it is quite undisturbed. And if you look here, there is a rotten post and rail broken off short, where he no doubt leant himself, or held by, and which has evidently given way."

"Besides, Cecil Conway was on the path below," said Villeroy, rather unadvisedly.

Everyone turned towards him.

Mr. Bissett looked at him keenly.

"We ought to look at the place where poor Henshawe fell," said the doctor.

"Certainly," agreed Villeroy.

And he, the doctor, Mr. Warren, Mr. Bissett, and the Inspector in the rear, made their way towards the path below, where Orlando Henshawe had been found. The lawyer and the doctor conversing together as they walked.

"Well," remarked Mr. Warren, "if any evil surmises were afloat regarding young Mr. Conway in this matter, he is fully exonerated now."

"Unquestionably so," the lawyer answered. "I only wish the other affair could be cleared up as successfully."

"Cecil Conway had no hand in that any

more than in this," said the doctor, heartily. "I would never believe it of him, if all the judges in England went against him. But where in Heaven's name is the will?"

"Ah! where is it?" said Bissett.

"Why," said Warren, "there is no proof, not the faintest shadow of an indication that it ever was in Conway's possession."

"That's in his favour, no doubt," Bissett answered.

"He knows no more about it than you do, or I either," said Villeroy. "Why, it may have been taken away days—almost weeks before Conway entered the house. It was missed the day he left, but it might have been taken days before."

"It is a mysterious business," said Bissett. "Who could have an interest in the will except the family themselves? If the will does not come to light, I

myself own that I do not feel so confident that Miss Granville is altogether safe."

"If you mean in the possession of the estate, she would be just as glad to have it taken away from her as some people would be to keep it. It is a source of misery to her," said the doctor. "I have attended her and ought to know. Her illness is entirely the result of an uneasy mind."

"Could she have destroyed it herself?" exclaimed the lawyer, stopping short in his walk.

"What! and let her cousin suffer all this for it?" said the doctor. "No, I should think not. Old Henshawe, who was really much to blame for leaving matters in abeyance as he did, poor man, thoroughly dinned it into her ears that she could do nothing, that nobody could get anything by it but trouble, that she would never have attempted such a thing;

you see there were plenty of witnesses heard it read, and could swear to the contents."

Mr. Bissett only shook his head. "An easy convenient way of getting out of a difficulty."

"My idea is," observed Warren, "that we never shall get out of the difficulty—there's Miss Granville been brought to death's door; there's Miss Conway has had a narrow escape of brain fever—by George, I thought we were in for it, but she's getting round again; there's poor young Conway in prison, and how it will end for him heaven knows! I don't see my way. The fact is the will was a bad, a wrong, an ill-fated one, he ought never to have spited those young people in the cruel way he did—it has brought misfortune on all concerned."

By this time they had reached the spot where Orlando Henshawe met his death.

"It is surprising how he got hold of those articles, after receiving such injuries, if it were indeed after," said the lawyer.

"Surprising, but not impossible," the doctor replied, "I have known people live hours in that style. I suspect loss of blood was the immediate cause of death. I can guess how it all was—the unfortunate man, I imagine, stumbled headlong on, perhaps even in his half-unconscious state scarcely aware that death was so near, and urged by the ruling passion of his mind, seized the little book and the handkerchief as proofs of Conway's being near, and clutched them in his dying struggle. It was a difficult matter to loosen his grasp sufficiently to get them out of his hand. The bludgeon, if you remember, was found some distance behind the other things. It probably fell from his hand, as he fell, and its weight brought it down to the bottom. It was a formidable weapon,

but unused. A dangerous instrument, whether intended for defence or aggression."

"I suppose," said Mr. Bissett, "it was in case of resistance, if he came out with the intention of capturing Conway."

"A savage mode of proceeding," remarked the doctor, "but he is gone to his account, poor creature."

The doctor was as near as possible right in his conjectures.

Orlando Henshawe had spent the night before his end at a house between Crown-Harden and Deerham, not very far from the upper part of the Crown-Harden shrubberies with some dissipated young men, playing cards and drinking a good deal of wine, but still more whisky and water, until long past midnight.

On leaving the party, heated, excited, half-maddened with the orgies of the night, he felt the freshness of the approaching dawn

cool his burning eyes and forehead, and drawn towards the place where Rosamond spent so much of her solitary life, he walked towards the tower, looking down on it from the elevation where he stood.

Then it was that his sharp ears detected the sounds of splashing water below him ; in vain he strained his sight, to see was impossible, but the more intently he listened, the more persuaded he became that some one was bathing in the ancient reservoir near the tower. Whence could they come in that private and secluded place? Who could it be at such an hour, and so secretly?—who but Cecil Conway? he waited till every sound was hushed, until dawn melted into day, then returned home more restless, suspicious, eager, than ever.

That very morning Granville suggested the very same idea, and the visit with Turk to the tower was the

result. At first, Orlando Henshawe really doubted again—he thought no woman was capable of so much self-possession, but as he reflected on it when alone, his convictions returned stronger than ever. Rosamond had acted exactly in the same manner that he, to whom artfulness was nature, would have done under similar circumstances. How cleverly she had detained the mastiff by her side, and deterred him from prosecuting his search; how resolutely she had dismissed them; with what cool determination she had guarded the place! Yes—Cecil was there concealed, cared for, cherished by Rosamond, and a jealous fury gave a tenfold zest to his hunger for vengeance.

He was certain that after the danger they had been in that day, Cecil would lose no time in quitting this place of refuge as soon as it was safe and practicable. Why not that very evening?

the longer he dwelt on the fancy, the more assured he became that that very evening his prey would escape him unless he crossed his purpose. An overwhelming desire at the same time came upon him to seize his enemy himself, and with his own hands to foil his endeavour.

“Yes, young lady,” he muttered to himself, “you please to scorn and insult me, but if you will not accept my love you shall rue it. I can make you weep, fair Rosamond, if I cannot make you smile. And you, insolent, presuming, vain coxcomb—I will teach you to repent your stolen interviews, your hours of happiness with the girl I love. You have sneered and laughed at me, and slighted me, but by the Heavens above us, you shall tremble before me, audacious fool that you are !”

With such reflections he primed himself

up to an enterprise that he really dreaded, for in one respect Orlando Henshawe was different from his friend Granville—he was a coward. Granville was not. With all his cruelty, he had that last remnant of a gentleman left; merciless as he was, he knew not fear. But Orlando Henshawe, with almost as little of pity, and more of craft, had a far larger proportion of timidity in his composition. He would rejoice to strike his enemy if he could strike safely—otherwise, he would be very unwilling to deal the blow.

But for once the passion of his jealousy and hatred overcame his caution, and armed with a heavy bludgeon, as soon as it grew dusk, he approached the tower from above.

In course of time he caught a glimpse of the figure of Cecil Conway walking rapidly along the path below. With swift but stealthy paces, his enemy

kept time with him, darting down cat-like watchful glances on young Conway, who would, he knew, have to ascend the cliffs by a dangerous pathway, where he could easily spring upon him from behind some rock or bush, and thus taking him unprepared, would have so great an advantage over him that the danger to himself would be slight. He saw too that Cecil was unarmed, he knew it was unlikely that he would offer resistance, and place himself in a worse position by so doing; but if he should, he must use the bludgeon to stun him, or bring him down—then with the leather strap he carried in his pocket, he could secure his arms, and have him entirely at his mercy.

Thus he strode along, gloating on his expected triumph, and the wretched discomfiture of the man he hated; as he thus pictured the coming event to himself, Cecil, all unconscious of the spy who

watched his actions, sat down on a large stone, and sent his silent farewell back to Rosamond and to Crown-Harden.

Above, a pair of lynx-like eyes, burning with expectation and abhorrence, were keenly fixed upon him, and a stealthy foot drew nearer and nearer to the edge of the precipice.

Cecil rose and proceeded onwards, thoughtlessly leaving behind tokens of his presence: the handkerchief that had cleared the gathering mists from his eyes, and a little memorandum-book that fell out of his pocket at the time he pulled out his handkerchief.

Henshawe could just discern the two tiny objects, like faint specks, from above; leaning forward unguardedly, the treacherous railing gave way and he fell over the brink. In the agony of his terror he caught hold of the elder-bush some little way down the face of the rock, and hung there some mo-

ments suspended. After a horrible and hopeless struggle the frail support gave way, the brier just beneath tore and grazed his outstretched hands, entangling at the same time his watch-guard, but did not retard his descent a moment, and he came crashing down on the hard, pitiless ground below, bewildered, half-stunned, but not utterly unconscious. More from a last instinct of revenge than with any settled purpose, he clutched those objects that would point out the presence of his enemy, and stumbling forward with a last dying cry of anguish and terror, he fell helpless across the path, while the soft night dews and the rays of the gentle crescent moon descended on the silent form.

CHAPTER VIII.

VILLEROY, in his letter to Cecil, gave him a short but clear account of all that had passed relative to the discovery of Henshaw's mode of death, declaring that all originated in the perseverance and thoughtfulness of Rosamond, and adding that his cousin would visit him that day. Blanche, he said, was better and would soon, he hoped, be able to leave her room.

At twelve the close carriage came to the door, and Rosamond, escorted by Villeroi, entering it, they took their way to the county town, stopping at the gates of Deerham prison.

Rosamond noticed neither the huge grim fetters that surmounted the broad archway, nor the dreary stone staircase, worn by mournful footsteps only, nor the long, dull, blank corridors ; she thought of Cecil alone. Her head swam dizzy, her eyes presented only wavering and indistinct objects, until the door was opened and Cecil stood before her. How altered in those few days ! A clear, unchanging pallor had chased all colour from his face ; his blue eyes shone large and bright, the very mirrors of truth ; his features seemed more sharply cut. She, who had seen no other thing, saw it all at a glance.

He came forward and gently thanked her for her goodness in coming ; she tottered towards him, and with a weak cry like a dying child's, she would have fallen, but that he supported her in his arms. He tenderly placed her on one of his only two chairs, and as he stood by her,

she rested her head against his side; she looked up at him as she so leant.

"Oh, Cecil! I would wish now to die!"

"No, Rosamond," he answered, "you must live, and love; you must be a happy wife and mother, and forget us—no, I cannot wish you to forget us quite—but all this will fade slowly away, till it seems only the recollection of a bad dream. When you think of us, dear Rosamond, think of us in our sorrow, not in our bad days of prosperity, and then tender and generous as you are, you will remember us with a great pity and a little love."

Rosamond took his hand and kissed it.

"Dear Cecil," said Villeroy, "you must not despond, you will get through this I feel confident."

"If I escape the worst I shall be thankful," Cecil said, "but if I am

dragged out of the mud, the stain can never be effaced."

"You are innocent and unstained," said Rosamond vehemently, her strength returning with the excitement of her feelings.

"Yes," Villeroy observed, "and remember you have been cleared of one cruel aspersion."

"Through Rosamond's wit and energy," said Cecil, "how can I thank you? Oh, Rosamond!"

"She will never strike her colours," exclaimed Villeroy, "nor I either."

"You have proved yourself a true friend," Cecil answered.

"I hope for a good deal more," said Villeroy. "I hope to prove myself a brother too."

"No, that is past," Cecil said, "I hoped it once, but not now. Poor little Blanche!"

"If Blanche is not for me, no other

girl ever will be," Villeroy exclaimed; "but now I wanted to ask you, have you any choice as to the counsel we engage? I am going up to town to-morrow."

"I am utterly ignorant of everything of the sort," Cecil replied. "I sometimes looked at the police reports in the papers, and that is all the knowledge of law I possess."

"Mine is about as extensive," said Villeroy, "but I shall go to our man of business, he can advise us."

"I am afraid it is very expensive," Cecil remarked.

"That is nothing," said Villeroy. "I have *carte blanche* from a friend. Do not let us bore ourselves where it is unnecessary."

"If you go to town, I suppose I must not hope to see Rosamond again till you return?" Cecil inquired.

"I think Blanche may be able to come and see you to-morrow or next day,

and then I can accompany her," said Rosamond. "We are very good friends."

"I am glad," Cecil replied.

They remained with him as long as it was possible, but the time seemed inconceivably short; and after this first parting under such new and terrible circumstances, what were the feelings of both? To say that words cannot express them, but half explains the deficiency. It is not words alone that are wanting. There are rare and exceptional moments of emotion too deep for us to comprehend them ourselves. It must be so, for our intellect is but human and finite; our souls are immortal and formed for those regions where we shall feel either in woe, or bliss, more than it has ever entered the heart of man to conceive.

On ordinary occasions our spirit lies within us, half-dormant, but there are some few occasions in our lives when its

depths are reached, and its latent energies awakened for a time; and then the strange powers that stir us, startle and almost overwhelm us. Such emotions swept through the heart of Cecil as he sat alone, his cheek resting on his hand, his eyes fixed unseeing on the floor; and such also were Rosamond's as she leant back silent in the carriage, her eyes vaguely following the passing clouds, blind to all present and existing.

And yet after these first hours had passed, Rosamond, without knowing why, felt less utterly oppressed and downhearted than before she had seen him. The novelty of the horrible situation had subsided. She saw the facts still stern and threatening before her; but they were no longer surrounded by the black mysteries of the unknown. However terrible reality may be, the imagination exaggerates it; and hers was a peculiarly sensitive, mobile, and suggestive fancy.

She would not see Blanche before she left Crown-Harden in the morning; but on her return she went straight to her bed-room, and was able to console and encourage her.

That evening Blanche was to sit up, and, if she bore the exertion, she was to see her brother the next day. While Blanche was having an hour of repose in her dressing-room after the fatigue of getting up, Rosamond sat alone in the library.

She had fallen into so deep a reverie that she started at the sound of her brother Stephen's voice, whom she had scarcely seen since the death of Orlando Henshawe.

"Well, Miss Rosamond," he began, "I suppose you will want to turn me out. I don't often trouble you with my company here, as I know you're not over fond of it, but the dining-room is —— dull, since poor Orlando has been smashed."

"It must be," she answered kindly. "I shall like you to stay with me an hour or so until Blanche comes in; she is not strong enough to bear any company."

"Mine you mean," said Granville. "Well, it's mutual. I don't enjoy hers. She's all affectation and conceit and impertinence. A little ape; her laughing always puts me in a rage."

"She does not laugh now," said his sister. Stephen gave a spiteful grin.

"That's just what makes *me* laugh. But what ails you? You look as dismal as a jib-cat. Have you had a split with Villeroy? Fool if you have! you're not likely to find such another ass. I don't want to be rude, but you're not what the men admire, they like something a little merry, and rosy, and impudent, don't you see? Just the opposite to yourself."

"I see," assented Rosamond unmoved, as she glanced at her brother.

Stephen was good-looking when perfectly quiescent, but when he spoke or laughed he was disagreeably plain. Such people are better avoided, it will generally be found that kind or clever persons improve upon you when they talk or smile, but those who lose everything in so doing are more frequently the reverse. After a short pause, Stephen recommenced the conversation.

"I know something that those —— Conways would give their ears to know."

"What is it?" inquired Rosamond.

"About that old cabinet," was the reply.

"What about the old cabinet?" she asked.

"Pooh! you would tell them."

"What is it, dearest Stephen? why should I tell them?" she repeated.

"You won't tell them," he rejoined, because I shan't tell you."

"I wish you would," said Rosamond, "I have not been unkind to you, have I, dear Stephen? I never refuse you what you want, and believe me I might be much more generous if you would be kind. What do you know about the old cabinet?"

"What will you give me, if I do tell you?" inquired Stephen.

"Anything in reason that you can ask," she replied.

"Well, twenty?"

"Yes,"

"Thirty?"

"Yes."

"Fifty?"

"If it is worth knowing, a great deal more than that," she said.

"Well, I'll be content with thirty. I like to be moderate. It is a promise?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you. It is made of walnut-wood, not oak, you owe me the thirty, mind you, eh?"

"Yes," Rosamond answered, "but I am sure, dear Stephen, you meant something more."

"How sweet and pleasant you are with your *dear* Stephen! You will see I shall be precious dear before you find it out."

"I do not believe you know anything more than I do," she said impatiently.

"Oh, I don't!" he sneered, "then if you say so, of course I don't; but I tell you I do! and what's more, no one knows it but I. I never told breathing creature, not even Orlando Henshawe. If it were known, I'm not sure that Conway would be where he is, that's all."

"Stephen!" said Rosamond earnestly, "you have seen Orlando Henshawe in death—a frightful, violent death—it must have made some impression on you! I entreat you, do not stifle the voice of your

conscience. What do you know? speak the truth."

"I suppose you never could guess," he said, delighted to tantalize and exercise his tormenting power over her.

"Is it something in connection with the will?" she asked.

"I suppose the cabinet and the will have some connection together," he answered.

"Stephen," she said, "if you ever loved me, say at once what do you mean?"

"And suppose I never did love you."

"Still, even then, if you are so cruel, you are not dishonest, dishonourable—you are a Granville. If you conceal what would save an innocent person from undeserved punishment, you are dishonourable."

Stephen Granville made no answer but by a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

"I learnt that shrug in France," he said mockingly.

"When did you find out this secret—

if it really is one, which I doubt?" she resumed.

"Let me see," replied Granville, counting on his fingers, and whispering his calculations to himself; "yes, three months ago I found it out."

"Three months ago!" she exclaimed; "that was before the will was gone."

She went up to him, put her arm caressingly round his shoulder, and pressed her soft cheek against his.

"Give me a kiss and tell me, darling."

"Well," he said, as if relenting, "you're a coaxing little— Jezebel! Get away with you," he finished savagely.

"Oh, Stephen, you make me too unhappy;" and she began to weep.

He looked at her, and burst out laughing.

"Hypocrite! now then, flare up! It's no use, you can't wheedle me. Come now, begin to curse and swear; *that* might answer."

"I still think you will do what every man of honour would feel bound to do," she said gravely; "you cannot act the part of a spy and traitor."

"Why not, if I have a reason?"

"What possible reason can you have?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Because I hate them." And such a demon-like fire blazed in his coal-black eyes and darkened his young face, that Rosamond shrank back from him appalled.

He stared at her a cruel, defying stare for a minute unmoved, and then strode out of the room.

Rosamond felt the necessity of conquering her distress and agitation before Blanche could surprise her, and with a most painful effort she strove to put aside, for the present, the grief and anxiety she suffered.

It was indeed not long before Blanche came in, fair and fragile as a lily in her

loose white muslin dress, with her bright hair carelessly looped up behind.

Rosamond looked at her with admiration. Not having seen her lately, except ill in bed, her beauty struck her afresh, as well as her resemblance to Cecil, which Rosamond thought was more marked than it used to be. The unusual languor in her blue eyes gave a softness to them which increased the likeness.

Rosamond ran to arrange her cushions on the sofa, kissing her tenderly, the restraint of shyness was broken through, and she was able to show herself as she was, gentle, animated, yet thoughtful.

It is impossible to account for the variations of our feelings; whether the sight of Cecil had excited her, or a fresh hope had sprung up from the words of Stephen, she could not say, but she was no longer desponding, and she contrived to inspire Blanche with more cheerful anticipations.

She did not mention what Stephen had said, nor would she suffer her thoughts to dwell on it until she was alone; but when Blanche had again retired, she gave her whole mind to the consideration of the subject.

Was it merely a groundless assertion made for the sole delight of tormenting her? no, she felt assured it was more than that. Stephen knew something that he at least believed would alter the position of Cecil and improve it, so far she was convinced she judged rightly.

But what was it? some secret relating to the cabinet? She could but think of one; possibly there might be some mode of arriving at its contents unknown to her. She thought of her secret door to the tower; was there some sliding panel, some trick that would enable a person to reach the drawers within, without opening the front doors at all?

With the assistance of Benson's brother,

who was a clever joiner and carpenter at Deerham, she determined she would early the next morning make a thorough examination of the old piece of furniture, and even if necessary take the whole cabinet to pieces. Before she retired to her room, she left orders for Thomas Benson to come over early in the morning, and lay awake half the night revolving the matter and puzzling herself over it.

Once or twice the idea did cross her mind whether it were possible that Stephen had himself abstracted the will; but she recollected that on the discovery of its loss, he had been so unfeignedly, not only enraged, but alarmed, and had betrayed such excessive anxiety lest his own fifteen thousand pounds should be endangered by its disappearance, that she dismissed the suspicion from her mind.

CHAPTER IX.

VILLEROY found a letter awaiting him at Deerham Park that had come by the afternoon's post from his uncle, Sir Philip Holland.

That gentleman had a disagreeable way of addressing his near relations as if they were strangers, therefore he began as usual.

“My Dear Sir,

“As I well know your sanguine disposition, I think it right to remind you of the purport of a conversation that may be within your recollection as to

Conway's law expenses. It occurred to me afterwards that you might perhaps have so far misunderstood me as to flatter yourself that I would be answerable in a pecuniary sense. If so, you were never more mistaken in your life, and the sooner you are disabused of the notion the better. However, since you appear to take it upon yourself to pronounce him an innocent and injured individual, I have out of charity enclosed a cheque for his use, and with prudence and economy it will, I presume, go some way towards defraying necessary expenses. I have mentioned to your poor mother your chivalric intentions towards the young woman his sister.

“Yours faithfully,

“PHILIP HOLLAND.”

Villeroy angrily tore the letter in two, then lifted up the cheque that fluttered away with the fragments; it was for

twenty pounds. Villeroy laughed scornfully. This was the generosity of a rich man! and this the way a gentleman fulfils his promise!

He sat down and scrawled his acknowledgment.

“My Dear Sir,

“I beg to thank you for your first instalment of twenty pounds; I daresay when you add to it the other two we shall make it do.

“Yours faithfully,

“HENRY VILLEROY.”

He sent his note off at once, lest his wrath should get cool by waiting.

Villeroy would not have been gratified if he had witnessed the rude shouts of laughter with which his angry missive was read.

Many persons believed that Sir Philip Holland was a particularly good-hearted man at bottom, calling him a rough diamond; rough he undoubtedly was,

but he had more of the flint than the diamond in his composition.

He enjoyed the excitement of creating a sensation and astonishing people by some unexpected burst of generosity; it suited his notion of his own character. There was one disadvantage in these traits of magnanimity—he would seldom abide by them, but disowned them in a cooler hour, as in the present instance.

It was no disappointment at the loss of the money that irritated Villeroy, he would gladly have paid every sixpence himself, and even had he not had the means, he knew well that Rosamond would feel a pleasure in spending half her fortune in the cause, but the meanness of so near a relation provoked him much.

There were also a few lines from his mother, whose letter he opened in some anxiety. He would have been sorry if hers had displeased him, but it was kind though short. She had generosity enough to

express her utter disbelief of young Conway's guilt, and regretted the sorrow that both he and his sister must suffer.

Villeroy therefore went off to town in better spirits and humour after reading it.

Rosamond was up early and was waiting in the study when Thomas Benson was shown in. She explained to him her wishes, and the honest man set to work in great hope of some favourable result. Rosamond locked the doors and drew down the blinds.

The first difficulty was to move the heavy cabinet from the wall so as to get at the back. With some labour this was accomplished, and Thomas Benson, kneeling down, examined it in every possible way, passing a finely-edged chisel along perpendicularly, horizontally, and diagonally; but the back was undoubtedly a solid thick slab of oak, neither painted nor varnished, without a seam or a crack.

He, with equal care, examined the sides, but unsuccessfully, they also were entire, then the front and the doors; every nick in the carving, every inch of the outside, each inlaid piece was felt, scratched, pricked, hammered, but nothing existed that could admit of a possibility of any undetected aperture; moreover, after the wide front doors were opened, they were found to be lined with a thin sheet of oak wood in an entire piece. All the drawers were taken out, but it was palpable that there could be no means of getting at them except the straightforward one.

Rosamond was deeply disappointed; she had hoped too much and laid too much stress on this fancy of hers. Much dejected, she put her silver key in old Benson's hand, and he turned it about admiringly.

"Quite a curiosity, Ma'am," he said, "and you see, Ma'am, it goes in so far into the lock, and the keyhole is not the same shape, so as not to point out the form of

the wards, which it would be next to impossible to imitate it without the pattern. It is a very—a most curious key.”

And still holding it in his open hand, with his head aside, and one eye cocked in a knowing way towards the ceiling, the old man seemed lost in thought. Rosamond waited breathlessly. Again he looked down at the key, weighing it as it were in his hand.

“It seems to me, Ma’am, unless I’ve dreamt it—that I have seen a key like it.”

“Try to remember,” said Rosamond, with suppressed eagerness.

But the fleeting recollection rather became dim than distinct, as he sought to recover it.

“I do believe I have seen one other such key in steel though, Ma’am, but where or who had it, I can’t rightly remember—however, this much I may say, I do think

there is just such another key somewhere."

"Oh! if you could but remember!" exclaimed Rosamond.

"I'm not so young as I was, Ma'am; I can't so well fix my thoughts as I used to do. It may come across me when I'm not thinking of it. Things often do, you know, Ma'am."

"If it does come across you," said Rosamond, "do pray, Mr. Benson, come and tell me without a minute's delay; and in case it should escape your memory, as is often the case with all of us, will you write it down at once in your pocket-book—to oblige me will you promise?"

"Yes, Ma'am, that I surely will, and with pleasure. I should be proud and happy if I could any way serve Mr. Conway; I always did think him such a fine-looking, pleasant young gentleman."

Soon after, Mr. Thomas Benson took his departure, having been warned by Rosa-

mond not to say a word to any person whatever regarding either the key or the cabinet.

When she was alone, she again sat in earnest meditation. Perhaps Stephen had seen that other key that the old man spoke of. What other secret could he have discovered? If such a key existed, it belonged to some one, and that person had easy access to the will. Moreover, unless that person had some reason for concealing the fact of being in possession of such a key, it was inexplicable that he did not come forward and produce it. A strong conviction arose in her mind that whoever had this key, also had the will and the missing documents. It seemed to her like a sundial with the figures erased, the needle steadily pointing right to the hour, but was it six or twelve?—impossible to tell.

One suggestion did, as old Benson expressed it, "come across her," but she scarcely knew how to work it out. If the

lawyer who was chosen for the defence were an acute and sensible man, would he condescend to talk and consult with a young girl like her? She much feared that he would not. She had not the least knowledge of her own powers. She little knew how strong was her intellect, how keen her perceptions, how much of innate logic there was in her reasoning faculties; she only knew that her heart was in it, and how earnest was her desire to assist her cousin.

Blanche was equally interested; she would have wondered and thought, but with all her brilliancy and talent she could not have drawn deductions as Rosamond did; yet, if they were correct ones, being a woman, they would only be accounted for by some instinct which had hit upon a lucky truth.

She did not forget that this key, on which she grounded so much, might have been lost long ago, and that, even if her

new idea had some foundation, she might not have the means of proving it; still she neglected nothing that might verify it if it were not a mistaken one.

She had just done so when Blanche entered, ready dressed for their drive to Deerham. Rosamond flew to her affectionately, placed her in a comfortable easy-chair, and hastened up-stairs to put her bonnet on.

They scarcely spoke as the carriage rolled along towards Deerham. Blanche was too much agitated, and Rosamond was desirous not to fatigue her before she reached her destination; when they passed over the paved streets of the little town, Rosamond for the first time addressed her,

“ Which shall I do, dearest Blanche? Of course I shall leave you alone with your brother, and only just go in with you for ten minutes—shall it be when

you arrive, or when you leave, as I
call for you ?”

“ When we arrive,” said Blanche.

CHAPTER X.

BLANCHE, who was less reflective than Rosamond, and more open to every present impression, felt all the horrors of association from the gloomy place she now entered for the first time in her life. A prison! A gaol! and her own Cecil a prisoner there! She felt the cold stone pavement beneath her feet, the air seemed to her oppressive and chill, the dull quiet acted almost hysterically on her, but she had the force to repress all show of emotion until the door was reached, and the two young girls were shown in to

Cecil, when she flew into her brother's arms, embracing him with wild energy over and over again.

"My own Cecil! my darling! Cruel wretches that they are!" and with incoherent words and sobs she clung to him.

"Blanche, pray compose yourself, my dear cousin, you distress him," said Rosamond at last, gently drawing her away.

"You will make yourself ill again, dearest Blanche," said Cecil.

His mild, quiet voice had a soothing effect on his sister, who, ashamed and sorry to have so lost her self-command, with some effort managed to compose herself. Cecil inquired anxiously about her health, and appeared to be more occupied as to her condition than his own.

"Mr. Villeroy went to town this morning," said Rosamond, wishing to

turn the attention of both to thoughts less personal and exciting; her endeavour was successful, and after her visit was concluded, she left them conversing sorrowfully, but no longer in such violent spasms of agonized emotion.

At the hour appointed, she again called for Blanche, who came down to her flushed and tearful, but no longer silent or reserved.

“Cecil has told me of all your goodness, dear Rosamond—how little we knew you in former days, how poorly we judged you.”

“Oh, do not speak of that,” said Rosamond, pained by the recurrence to past times.

Rosamond seldom spoke it out, but in her heart was a deep agony of self-reproach—yet not exactly that, for though she had irretrievably wronged them both, it was unintentionally.

But she had been their bane and their

ruin. She had taken from them the ample fortune they had believed to be their own, their home, their all; she had induced Cecil to pay her this last fatal visit to Crown-Harden. It was she who had given him the key and sent him to the cabinet, and had thus brought on them their last and heaviest affliction, and what could she do for them in compensation? Nothing.

These were the thoughts that perpetually haunted and goaded her. She was their destiny, their evil genius, how then could she endure their thanks or praises?

Blanche had a private uneasiness too of her own. She had remarked Cecil's flush when he spoke of Rosamond. She feared there was more than gratitude, or cousinly affection, for her in his heart; this would indeed be the summit of their misfortune, for she said to herself, Cecil is not like me. I could throw off such

feelings, love would be no master of mine; but Cecil has ten times more feeling and tenderness than I—hopeless love would be misery to him.

As these reflections passed through her mind, she looked at Rosamond and was frightened at her charms and attractions.

“No one,” she thought, “could ever love Rosamond a little, whoever loves her will be bound, enthralled, enslaved for ever. Those beautiful eyes, so full of soul, beaming out from under their long soft lashes; those sweet and pensive features, so earnest and so true; that lithe and graceful figure. Her beauty may not be quite according to rule and measure, but it speaks straight to your heart. Then her goodness, her warmth of heart—”

Blanche’s earnest scrutiny rather embarrassed Rosamond, who could have no insight into her thoughts.

"What are you thinking about me?" she asked, with a slight blush.

"I was noticing how much you are improved in looks," answered Blanche. "Rosamond, we must not let Cecil fall in love with you."

"With me!" exclaimed Rosamond, her blush rising to a brilliant carmine.

"Indeed he must not," said Blanche. "Uncle Nicholas has taken good care that you and he shall never come together. You know, Rosamond, that if by our 'selfish and unprincipled conduct we deluded you into a marriage with him,' you would forfeit every shilling! I know your generous heart, my little cousin, but poor Cecil was never meant for poverty, least of all poverty with a wife and children; though you must not suppose that I take your consent for granted. Indeed I do not. If dear Cecil does get off, we must go abroad at once, to some place where

he will not have a chance of ever seeing you."

If Blanche had held a dagger before her eyes, Rosamond could not have felt a more cruel pang. A sudden woe and panic turned her cheek pale, and checked abruptly the beating of her heart.

"As friends," she faltered out at last.

"I am afraid you and he would be too dear friends. No, it will be a grief to all, but we must part—part entirely—with no flattering hope of meeting again. I too regret it, darling, for I have got much attached to you."

"If"—Rosamond hesitated.

"You must yourself see," said Blanche, a little gravely, "that Cecil, neither in honour nor common prudence, could possibly propose to you."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Rosamond, "I should never dream—never think of such a thing; besides, Cecil is always so much

admired—so many others, so far more worthy and beautiful than I”——

“I think not,” interrupted Blanche, “he has seen many girls, and never been in love a bit. He might take it into his head to fall head over ears in love with you, and then just reflect, we *should* be in a pretty mess! not only poor and disgraced, but with an utterly miserable and hopeless love affair on our devoted heads.”

“It is so unlikely,” urged Rosamond, though rather faintly.

“Unlikely!” repeated Blanche, “are you quite sincere?”

“And we might be friends,” continued Rosamond, “cousins ought. I should be quite happy if we could all live near together in any place in the world, and see each other when we liked.”

Blanche smiled, the excessive simplicity of her poor little cousin diverted her, little in the laughing mood as she was,

especially as Rosamond looked the least in the world hurt.

“You would be happy so, I dare say, dear, especially at first, but men are more impetuous and not so easily satisfied. If he loved you, and saw you constantly, he would not be happy without making you his wife. No, dear Rosamond, we will go and bury ourselves in some little cranny in the Pyrenees, and you will be the fair Châtelaine of Crown-Harden, and by-and-by, marry some young lord or other. If Lord Dornington were to die, what do you say to Henry Villeroy?”

“Oh, Blanche!” exclaimed Rosamond, who thought her cousin very unfeeling to-day.

“Well,” said Blanche, “why not? I am sure you used to admire him.”

“Yes, a childish fancy,” said Rosamond. “I thought him the hero of all

the poems and romances I read, when they happened to be dark—but now !”

“Well, he is as dark and as handsome as ever, and just as good a hero.” Blanche observed.

“Why ! he likes you, you know,” said Rosamond.

“Me !” exclaimed Blanche very loftily, “I am not one of your loving sort. It is a pity that I did not get married to the dear Joachim before all these misfortunes happened !”

“You could never have liked him,” cried Rosamond.

“No, but his money ; think how useful it would be now. I could have managed him, I know. All I care for on this earth is Cecil.”

She spoke those words from the heart ; she did love Cecil tenderly, faithfully, and Rosamond doubted whether she ever could love anyone else.

"Still," Rosamond observed, "I am sorry you regret Mr. Martinez."

"My dear, I don't; I think him detestable. I had a merciful escape, I know I was wicked in accepting him. Do not look so shocked at me, dear child;" and she kissed Rosamond with a warmth of affection that almost startled, though it gratified, its object. Perhaps Blanche read a portion of the sad little elegy in Rosamond's heart, and a touch of pity softened her rare caress into gentleness.

Rosamond now had a glimpse of the dark chasm opening beneath her feet; she felt, with a rush of confusing terror, that what she felt for Cecil was not—no, it was not pure, simple, cousinly kindness; it was something more overpowering, more irresistible, that submerged like a flood every other fancy, hope and feeling. But it was in vain; they must not love, they must not even meet. No; she and he must put the wide world, lands and oceans between

them, and yet in heart she would be ever near him. She was staggered, bewildered, but even then her unselfish nature conquered.

“No matter,” she thought, “there will be time enough for sorrow—a life long; now I must put aside these thoughts, and think of him only—only of him.”

And this resolution brought back the life to her eye and her heart. She turned with a sweet smile to Blanche :

“Until he is free, until *then*, I may think of him and do all I can for him.”

“Yes, you noble girl,” said Blanche with enthusiasm; “Rosamond, you deserve success.”

Blanche sat in thought, then turning to her cousin she asked :

“Shall you go to the trial?”

“Yes,” replied Rosamond.

“And I shall,” Blanche rejoined; “and if—if he should be brought in guilty, there will not be a woman in the court so proud

of the man she looks up to as I of my condemned brother. Wherever he may go, I will follow—were it to the most desolate and miserable part of the world, there I will live, though it should be on bread and water, were it only to catch a sight of him once in the week, and live on that glimpse till the next came round. He should feel that one was faithful to him.”

Rosamond drew near to Blanche, put her arm round her waist, and leant her head upon her shoulder. There was a strength in her cousin that Rosamond respected. The moment before, she had felt her heart wither before the uncompromising, the almost harsh words of Blanche—she had bluntly exposed all its most hidden and tender feelings. Rosamond had scarcely dared to name the word of love, even in the secret recesses of her thoughts, and Blanche had dragged it carelessly into the full glare of light, only to trample on all that was sacred to her;

but her brave, affectionate devotion cancelled every error.

Blanche, on entering her dressing-room, found a letter addressed to her lying on her table, and was surprised on opening it to find that it was from Sir Philip Holland. It was short and not particularly sweet. It began—

“Dear Lady,

“Excuse my honesty in expressing a hope that you will not accept that foolish young man, my nephew, Henry Villeroy. Whatever the world may please to fancy, his own fortune is inconsiderable. I mean him to inherit mine, but if he marries to displease me, I cut him off with a shilling.

“I was much concerned to hear of the misfortune of your brother, especially as I believe he had no more to do with the loss of the will than my grey pony had. He impressed me favourably ; I formed a good

opinion of him, and trust sincerely that he will have justice done him. If you want money tell me so.

“Yours obediently,
“PHILIP HOLLAND.”

Without even waiting to take off her bonnet, Blanche sat down and wrote a hurried answer, smiling to herself meanwhile, as she remembered that this was the second time she had been refused in marriage, although now it was done by proxy.

“My dear Sir,

“I hasten to relieve your anxiety about your nephew, by assuring you that no persuasions would induce me to accept him were he to offer; not because I am blind to his merits, but that the more I see of his goodness, generosity, and honour, the more firm is my resolve not to link his fate to ours. I thank you gratefully for your kind

expressions towards my brother ; whatever
I may be, he deserves them all.

“ Yours truly,

“ BLANCHE CONWAY.”

CHAPTER XI.

LATE in the evening of the following day, the two cousins were seated close together on the sofa, Rosamond half timidly caressing Blanche, when Villeroy was shown in.

He had seen Mr. Harding, the barrister, whose services he wished to secure, and the result was satisfactory. Mr. Harding had undertaken the case, entering into it heartily. They had had a long conversation on the subject and Mr. Harding gave great encouragement. He even expressed some surprise, in the first instance, that Cecil had been committed on such grounds.

"But of course," he had added, "I cannot give an opinion until every particular is laid before me; and we must be prepared for everything. As we all know, persons are often acquitted though we have a moral certainty of their guilt; at others, the long and winding chain of circumstantial evidence so entangles and ties up a case that one can hardly manage to unwind it."

What he least liked was the impossibility of finding any other person who could have had a motive to destroy the will.

Villeroy gave the most favourable view to the ladies, and as long as they were cheered by his conversation and hopeful representations, they were both of them sanguine, and Blanche almost confident.

"Ah! she said, "if only we get through this trouble, every other will seem light indeed. I shall scarcely have a wish beyond. As I tell Rosamond, we will go and hide ourselves among the Pyrenees,

and forget the cruel world, and all that is in it."

"I hope not," said Villeroy, "you will not forget your friends I trust."

"I shall feel towards them everlasting gratitude, and not least towards you, Mr. Villeroy. You have shown yourself a staunch friend—far more so than we deserved. If I live to be eighty I shall always remember it, even though we may never meet again."

"I could not reconcile myself to so hard a sentence, Miss Conway," said Villeroy, "you acknowledge the friendship I feel for Cecil; there is another, a still warmer feeling that you ever avoid."

"Do you mean love?" asked Blanche, with a shade of hardness in her tone. "Mr. Villeroy, I have always abjured and shunned it. Shall I own in what way I regard it—as a treacherous quicksand, and all I desire is to take the tide at the full, and steer my little vessel

lightly over it. See the poor ships that get wrecked on it! one is held fast, and the winds and the waves knock it to pieces, tear down the bulwarks, drag off the decks, lash the whole to ruin, and there float—all that is left—a few dark planks on the raging sea. Or else the unlucky vessel is swallowed up at once, and down she goes, only one tip of a tall mast being left like a warning finger pointed up to the pitiless sky.”

“What a merciless picture, Miss Conway; have you no other than such a one?”

“Oh, yes,” Blanche continued, “love takes you away from real life, and all that is pleasant and natural, and plants you in a region of night-mare, where there is seen here and there a bright fleeting phantom, while all the rest are hideous chimeras, black, unshapely monsters, sights of darkness, and sounds of thunders and groanings.”

Villeroy laughed.

"Is there then no such thing at all as happy love, Miss Conway?"

"No," she answered, "for when people ought to be happy, that poisoned potion drugs it all. Whoever loved without doubts, and jealous fears, and discontent? One loves too much, the other not enough. One man will not suffer his angel to look at another man, while one woman is whining because her beloved did once think of one other besides herself. Oh, no! the house may be small, and very poor, but keep love outside the door and it may be borne."

Blanche spoke vehemently, for she felt alarmed, angry, and impatient—fearing that her brother's small remnant of peace might be destroyed by the mischief-maker she dreaded, nor was she unwilling to scare him away both from Rosamond and Villeroy if she could; but Villeroy felt as little exhilarated by her animadversions as Rosamond had been.

"It is quite natural," he said after a pause, "that engrossed as you must be with one absorbing thought, all others must appear importunate and misplaced."

"Yes, no doubt," said Blanche, in her most discouraging tone.

She then got up from her seat.

"Good night, Mr. Villeroy; good night, dear Rosamond; I am tired, but that is no reason why you should wish to go upstairs. Shall I tell Mrs. Benson to bring you in some wine and biscuits? She can stay in the little room beyond and chaperon you."

"Do, dear Blanche, if you please," said Rosamond, who was disinclined to go to rest, and wished to have some conversation with Henry Villeroy. Mrs. Benson was so kind, motherly, and well-educated a person, that Rosamond used often to have her to sit with her, or ask her to bring her work into the

little adjoining room, when she did not wish to be quite solitary; so the good old lady sat down contentedly with her knitting, while her thoughts rambled back to other days.

She had always shown herself affectionate and mild to Rosamond when no one else was, but she also loved her beautiful Miss Blanche and Mr. Conway, and felt sincere grief for their misfortunes. She liked young Villeroy, and scarcely knew whether to bestow him on Rosamond, or her cousin, sometimes the balance leant one way, sometimes the other; but he was the only man she considered good enough for either of them.

Villeroy had nearly exhausted the subject of his meeting with Mr. Harding, and all he had said; but still the most trifling observation bearing on the point interested Rosamond, and he kindly brought to remembrance every

trivial remark that was made. When absolutely nothing more remained to be said, he glanced up at a picture of Blanche as a beautiful child, that hung near the chimney-piece.

She was standing at an open window, letting loose a bird from her hand; a dark blue cloak dropped loosely from her shoulders, while the light fell full on her white dress, fair arms, bright yellow hair, and lovely delicate face; her large eyes were following, with a half vague, half wondering gaze, the flight of the bird towards a sky of azure mottled with snowy clouds. It was not a highly finished, but a most graceful, picture, full of life and ease, gay as the sweet subject it depicted.

“That is Blanche all over,” said Villeroy, “a child more fond or impassioned could not have parted with its pet; or if she had, it would have cost her tears, but there she stands,

content to see it happy, and to lose it for ever. So bright, so good, so beautiful, but so incapable of love."

"I think not," said Rosamond.

"What do you think not?" asked Villeroy.

"I think she is not incapable of love. She would not be so warm, so severe against it if she had not some belief in its power."

Villeroy turned quickly on Rosamond, half in surprise, but checked himself. He perceived that Rosamond was a child no longer. He felt almost sorry; hers had not been a merry childhood, was the joyous thoughtless time all passed for her? he well knew that she was not one who could sail easily and lightly over the quicksands of life. Poor little girl, he thought, she seems to have been defrauded of her share of happy folly.

"Blanche says that you would miss your

yacht, if you lost her, more than any other thing," said Rosamond.

"She knows better," Villeroy answered. "I care for my yacht just as Cecil cares for his horses, but there are things I love more. Blanche is a capital sailor. When I took my first trial trip in the *Ariel*, before I bought her, my mother and some of her friends sailed in her, and she took Blanche and Mary. It blew up rough, and if the *Ariel* had not been a regular clipper, it might have been disagreeable; all the ladies and some of the men were ill, laid up in their berths and frightened, but Blanche, who was only a girl of sixteen, was in raptures; she flew about the decks, and held on, when she could not stand, in a blue pilot's jacket, with all her yellow hair flying in the wind. I liked her from that day, and always shall."

There was one confidence that Rosamond longed, yet dreaded to make; she

scarcely knew how to speak it, yet this was an opportunity that she felt she ought not to lose. Seeing therefore that Villeroi was preparing to take leave, she, at the very last moment, summoned up her courage, and began.

"Mr. Villeroi," she said, "I wished to tell you something that my brother said to me."

The mention alone of Stephen was sufficient to account for her embarrassment, for Villeroi knew how uneasy his conduct made her.

She then repeated word for word what had passed relating to his knowledge of circumstances that might alter the appearance of the case.

"And you do not think," said Villeroi, "that what he mentioned was merely intended to harass you?"

"No, I am persuaded it was not."

"And you have no hope of extracting from him what it is?"

"Not any," Rosamond replied.

"If there should be a trial, are you willing that your brother should be called upon?"

"Yes," she said, "if it would answer any good purpose."

"Even if it threw suspicion on himself?"

"If it cannot be otherwise," she answered sorrowfully.

"You do not believe he has any share in the taking it?"

"No, I do not indeed," she said; "I well know his faults, but I do not believe it."

"If he had, could you bear him to stand in the situation of Cecil Conway?"

"Yes, if he were guilty, and Cecil innocent. But I am convinced that Stephen had no participation in the act."

She then related her examination of the cabinet, and Thomas Benson's de-

claration that he had seen another key like her own.

Villeroy thought this more important than the assertion that Stephen had made, but agreed with Rosamond that the two coupled together did suggest new considerations.

He thought that Rosamond had shown great prudence in all she had done, as well as in refraining to speak to anyone about it.

"I should recommend you," he said, "still to preserve silence on the point till we can see Mr. Harding, and hear what he thinks. You have not even told Miss Conway?"

"No," Rosamond said, "I have not."

"I think you are right," he answered; "if it leads to nothing, it would be a disappointment, and add to her trouble and perplexity."

"That is what I thought," said Rosamond, "for I assure you, Mr. Villeroy, it

has added to mine, though it has given me a little trembling gleam of hope."

After a little more discussion on the subject, Villeroy took leave, and Rosamond retired, anxious and weary, to her room.

CHAPTER XII.

“**D**EAREST Rosamond,” Blanche said the next morning, as the carriage came round that conveyed them each day to Deerham, “you had better not go to-day;” and she put on the little shade of imperiousness that she could always command when she wished to be obeyed. It was a tone Rosamond found it difficult to resist. She changed colour, but assumed firmness to ask, “Why not?”

“You are not at all well this morning,” said Blanche, “I can see that.”

“Indeed the drive to Deerham is just the thing to do me good. If you wish to

see Cecil alone, I might only just come in for ten little minutes before you leave him."

"Better not this morning," said Blanche with decision.

Rosamond dared not persist, though she felt a blank disappointment that seemed to darken the whole day.

Blanche went off without looking at or speaking to her, evidently with the intention of avoiding a renewal of the question; but she felt saddened and uneasy at the ungracious part she had forced herself to take. She could not rally her spirits when she rejoined Cecil, and the conversation languished. After some time had elapsed, she noticed her brother's frequent and anxious glances towards the door.

"Rosamond is not coming to-day, dear," said Blanche.

"Not coming! why not?" he exclaimed.

"Dearest, I wished her not," she answered.

"That is cruel," he said hastily; "see me, Blanche, shut up here; I can do nothing—I cannot step outside that door. Why do you prevent her from visiting me?"

"Why do you so much wish it?" she inquired.

He looked up sharply at her. There was a depth of earnestness in his large, soft blue eyes that she had never seen in them before.

"Why! Do you ask me why, Blanche? Do you not guess—do you not *know* that I love her? Love! I could worship her! My whole heart, my whole soul, is hers—little darling! When she looks a little shy and awkward, holding her white hands together, going a few steps sideways, and her head drooping, with those long lashes resting on her pale cheek, she is more beautiful than the Venus of Medici."

"Dear Cecil, but consider how unrea-

sonable, how hopeless it would be, how wretched for both of you !”

“Both !” interrupted Cecil with animation, “both ! do you think *she* cares for me, do you indeed ?”

“I know nothing,” Blanche replied, “But what can it lead to ? never to happiness, or peace ; she can never be yours.”

“Do not speak of her being mine,” exclaimed Cecil, with a dark troubled look, “I cannot bear it, I try never to think of that.”

“But how utterly senseless, my own darling Cecil ! only reflect—our uncle’s will is, I am persuaded, still in existence, my hope is that it may still be produced in time—and then remember, if she married you, she would forfeit every sixpence. You could not—I know you would not allow that ; you are separated, it is irretrievable. Alas ! the dead cannot return to repair the evil they have done,

the misery they have caused. *She* never, never can be yours—you never can be happy with her—oh, dear Cecil! to undo this fatal knot—to see you happy and united to her, I would die—but it can never be!” And Blanche burst into tears, and threw herself on her brother’s neck.

“I know that there is no happiness for me, Blanche, I am tolerably resigned; but this short, great happiness of seeing her, if only a few minutes day by day, you must grant me. Think how soon it will be over—think what may follow—let me have something to look back upon, do, dear Blanche—let me have some dear memories, if I have no hopes.”

“My darling! My heart’s treasure! forgive me—you shall, Cecil—I will not interfere between you; but oh! do not—I beseech you do not yield farther to

this madness—for every little feeble bud of joy, you will reap a whole harvest of thorns. How unhappy! how fatal that of all the girls in the world you should love Rosamond!”

“But,” rejoined Cecil, “is she not adorable? she is like a little fawn, a little trembling bird. I have folded her within my very innermost heart. Oh, Blanche! the descriptions of love are cold and unreal, it is not to be spoken in words.”

“Yet, Cecil, you seem not to find it so; can you think of nothing else?”

“No,” he answered, “talk to me of Rosamond, tell me of nothing but her. How did she look when you would not let her come? what did she say? did she say anything?”

“She seemed sorry,” said Blanche; “she did not look well, and I told her she had better not go out.”

“And then?” asked Cecil.

"She said she thought the drive would do her good."

"Oh, Blanche! I wonder at you! I wonder how you could refuse her!"

"I will not again," Blanche answered, "but I am for ever thinking of you, of these fearful perplexities—surely, Cecil, you must."

"Yes, I do not forget; but to what purpose?—I can do nothing—we must trust to a higher power; we know that things are not disposed by chance or blind fate."

"Yes, yes, dearest—but for that faith I should go mad, Cecil; it is strange, is it not, one of our enemies is gone."

"Yes," replied Cecil gravely, "I wish he had had more time."

"No time would have availed for him."

"I have had such a kind letter from Villeroy," said Cecil; "he has narrowly

escaped shipwreck — but you must read it.”

The time of parting had now arrived, Cecil held Blanche’s hands in his and looked wistfully in her face.

“ Let me have as much of Rosamond as I can—seeing her fills up my whole day.”

“ I will, I will,” said Blanche, though a sharp pain went through her heart, and as soon as she was alone in the carriage, she leant back in the corner and shed torrents of tears.

“ How he loves her ! how much better than me ! but that is nothing if he could be happy with her—that would not cost me a pang ; but so useless ! so vain a love ! poor fellow ! was he not unhappy enough without that !”

On re-entering Crown-Harden she ran up to her bed-room, conquered the passion that overcame her, bathed her eyes and face, and came down determined to combat

the deep sorrow that almost subdued her. Never had she been so gentle, so affectionate in her manner to Rosamond. She sat silent on the sofa by her side, resting her throbbing head on Rosamond's shoulder, and for the first time Rosamond thought that her cousin loved her at last.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FEW days had passed without any event taking place worth recording, except that Blanche received in due time an answer to her note from Sir Philip Holland; its tone was much more kind and conciliatory than she had expected. This time he addressed her as

“My dear Young Lady,

“I perceive that beautiful women like you were created expressly for the destruction of silly young men like my nephew, as well as to make fools of wise ones like me, wherefore I conclude I must hold

Henry Villeroy excused. After your disagreeable business at Deerham is over, I shall feel proud and happy if you and your brother will pay me a visit at Holland Abbey in your own proper characters (not in masquerading suits) when I will procure some ancient and discreet matron-dowager to sit at the helm and make all proper. Please to give my kind remembrances to your tall, brave brother.

“Yours faithfully,

“PHILIP HOLLAND.”

As Blanche had often heard Lady Dornington mourn over the desecration of Holland Abbey, where cigars and masculine abominations reigned supreme, and no petticoats were admitted, she knew that this invitation was a most unusual favour and honour. She did not know whether she would show her invitation to Villeroy or not, and as she debated the point alone in her dressing-room she blushed rosy red.

She rather wished to do so, but for once in her life experienced a very new sense of timidity and shyness, which she would not have betrayed for the world, and still undecided, she came down to the drawing-room where she found Rosamond and Villeroy seated.

She had scarcely taken her seat, when Benson came to say that some one was very anxious to speak to Miss Conway.

“Who is it?” she asked.

“A poor rough-looking man.”

“He must send up his message,” said Blanche.

“So I told him, Ma’am, but he says he can’t; it is something very particular about Mr. Cecil Conway, and his name is Ben.”

“Oh, show him up at once!” exclaimed Blanche.

It was Ben Darley, who without any circumlocution, declared that he was a friend of Mr. Conway’s, and had walked

all the way from Holland Abbey woods to know if he could be of any service to him. He had walked day and night with scarcely any intermission or rest since he had heard of Cecil's misfortune, "for," he said, "he was very good to me."

"Oh, Ben!" exclaimed Blanche, "how good of you, how much I thank you; do sit down, do rest yourself."

"No, Ma'am, I know my manners better; I rested before I came up here. You are his friend, Sir, I suppose, for I think it's Mr. Villeroy, though we don't often see you in our parts."

"Yes," said Villeroy, "you are quite right."

"Both these are his dear friends," said Blanche, approaching him, and giving him a chair.

"Who's yon?" he demanded in a low voice, looking at Rosamond.

"That is our cousin, Miss Granville, who is very good to my brother."

"Miss Granville!" repeated Ben, "what! a sister is she of Mr. Stephen Granville?"

"Yes," answered Blanche in some surprise.

"Then you don't know that I've met with Mr. Stephen Granville?"

"No," replied Blanche, "I do not."

Ben sat musing a few minutes in some embarrassment; he felt that if Mr. Cecil Conway had not himself made known to his own sister, perhaps for some reason he did not understand, their encounter in the Holland Abbey woods, he had no right to do so.

Blanche observing his perplexity, could only suppose that he felt the presence of those who were strangers to him to be a restraint; the same idea occurred to Rosamond.

"Would you like to speak to Miss Conway alone?" she inquired.

"I don't know, Ma'am, I should presently—or to the gentleman."

"But," said Blanche, "what a journey you have had! how noble-hearted you are! oh, Ben! I had a kind letter from Mrs. Brewster, and she told me for the first time of your goodness in watching by night at the Lodge. Indeed it went to my very heart, I cannot thank you, but I am grateful. I shall always feel for you the truest friendship."

"It is not for you to say such words to me, Ma'am, they're what I feel for you and Mr. Conway; but I came here to see if I can in any way be of use to him, if I can do anything for him I will, whether according to law or against. The child's in a better place than this, where she's took care of more than I ever could, so it don't signify what happens to me."

"Oh, Ben! I thank you, if there were anything to be done I would ask you; but I know not at present how."

“ And you say, Ma’am, that Mr. Villeroy is a friend to be trusted ?”

“ A most kind one,” answered Blanche.

“ I shouldn’t mind then, Sir, speaking to you five minutes alone.”

“ Shall I go down with him into the little blue room ?” asked Villeroy.

“ Do,” said Blanche, “ and will you kindly order what refreshment our friend would like. As soon as your conference is over, let me know. I shall come down and hear how you all get on at your place, Ben. I shall like to have a little chat with you in the blue room.”

Villeroy and Ben accordingly repaired thither, when Ben, in a clear, straightforward manner, gave a full account to Villeroy of Stephen Granville’s conduct at Holland Abbey ; of his bribing him to attack Cecil in the woods ; of the night conflict ; of his attempting to use the knife, and of his firing the pistol—fully confessing his own share in the business.

"You may bring it all forward," said Ben; "I'll speak the truth and stand to it, whatever the consequences may be to me. It'll show 'em what the varmint is. If, as I've heard, he's the man that stands up accuser against Mr. Cecil, it'll open folk's eyes, I reckon."

"Indeed it will, and I thank you most sincerely, Ben," said Villeroy; "it will indeed show the *animus*, especially as I believe Mr. Stephen Granville will be called upon. But do not say a word to anyone until I have seen Mr. Conway; we cannot be too cautious."

"I can understand that," said Ben; "when I used to set a snare, I didn't set a barking cur alongside of it."

When the matter was concluded, Villeroy summoned Mrs. Benson, and with many recommendations entrusted Big Ben and his comforts to her care. Without returning to the drawing-room he went off

straight to Deerham and obtained admittance to Cecil.

As soon as they were alone, he informed Cecil of Ben's arrival, and of his wish to serve him at his own risk in the manner he had described. Cecil was much moved by the man's generous self-devotion, but would not think of allowing him to fulfil his intentions.

"No," he said, "it is quite irrelevant to the present case."

"I see it differently," remarked Villeroy; "the matter could easily be introduced; it would show the bad spirit of your enemies, and throw discredit on all the evidence they could bring against you."

"Besides," objected Cecil, "it would seem like a piece of revenge."

"Nonsense!" said Villeroy impatiently, "in common prudence you should take every step that could justify or be of use to you. Granville has been very active against you, I can tell you."

"I could not do it," declared Cecil, "it would break Rosamond's heart."

Villeroy was silenced; he saw how it all was.

"And really," added Cecil apologetically, "we all know that Stephen is not gifted with a happy disposition; the heat and excitement of the struggle made him half beside himself; he hardly knew what he was doing; he was scarcely responsible for his own deeds."

"Of course," replied Villeroy, "all shall be exactly as you wish."

"Then I entrust it to you, Villeroy, to enforce Ben's silence. Will you?"

"I will," said Villeroy gravely.

He felt, indeed, the deepest concern; he perceived that Cecil loved Rosamond. He knew that so ill-fated, so hopeless an affection could but add bitterness and sorrow to his future life.

Cecil knew that his friend read his feelings, and dreaded lest he should say one

word ; but Villeroy did not ; what could he have said ?

He left him soon after, for he saw Cecil's extreme anxiety lest Ben should betray what he knew, before he was warned not to do so.

Villeroy, on his return to Crown-Harden, lost no time in conferring with Ben ; but he had much difficulty in convincing him that Cecil was determined to have no word mentioned, and in extorting from him a promise to that effect. At last he remarked :

“Mr. Cecil says it would break Miss Rosamond's heart. She has been very kind, and they are very much attached to each other.”

“Oh, ah !” said Ben, with a prolonged sigh ; “that's a pity—a pity, but I understand.” And with this he gave the required promise. “But,” he added, “stone walls don't always keep a friend within 'em, nor a friend out. I'm pretty

near as strong as Sampson who carried off the great gates on his shoulders; and if it did come to that . . . you take me, Sir."

"Yes," said Villeroy; "but we will leave that to the last."

Ben gave him a knowing wink, and so they parted, Ben to enjoy the full measure of Crown-Harden hospitality.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUT a new actor was now to re-appear on the scene. As Rosamond was finishing her toilet one or two mornings after Ben's arrival at Crown-Harden, a note was brought in to her.

She received it with a start of emotion, and tore it hastily open. It was from Mr. Richard Conway.

"My dear and respected Miss Granville,

"I have only lately returned to England from New York, whither I was bound

when I left your hospitable mansion on very important business. I have but now received your letter, delivered to me by the partner of my legal friend, Mr. Andrews. I was on the receipt of it preparing to make my way to Crown-Harden. I trust that my unexpected arrival will not occasion you trouble. I am used to rough it; so beg you will put me out of the way in any corner that may happen to be unoccupied. I must apologise for the liberty I am now taking, as well as for my many errors and mistakes, more especially in the very useful forms of polite society, though I trust that in all matters of business you will find me exact, punctual, and unfailing as clock-work. I trust you know me well enough to believe that I would not take a step involving the value of a shilling except according to strict law and justice—no, not to save my own life, or that of

my dearest friend. Therefore the kind opinion of me you expressed in your highly-esteemed favour of the nineteenth is, I may venture to say, not misplaced. I shall venture to bring with me a friend—I ought rather to say a new-formed acquaintance—who may, I hope, prove useful to you, as well as Mr. Andrews, a very worthy and excellent gentleman. If you will do me the favour to receive me within your hospitable doors, we will wait on you at half-past four this afternoon, when, I trust, there will be certain communications imparted that may relieve you of some anxiety. I shall see your cousin, Mr. Cecil Conway, as I pass through Deerham. Will you offer my best respects and kind compliments to Miss Blanche Conway,

“And believe me, &c., &c.,

“RICHARD CONWAY.”

Half-wild with mixed emotions of hope,

doubt, and wonder, Rosamond flew into Blanche's room with the letter. Blanche read it attentively, but did not see a sufficient cause for Rosamond's agitation.

"But don't you see, dearest Blanche, he says he will make certain communications that may relieve our anxiety."

Blanche shook her head doubtingly.

"Poor old Don Ricardo is a very good, simple man, but not altogether one to depend on. Besides he has been absent the whole time. I fear the mountain will prove only a mole-hill. Some good-natured suggestion I dare say; or perhaps Mr. Andrews has persuaded him of his power to assist us, because he would like to be employed in the affair. I know the poor man has completely lost all his business. Uncle Nicholas used to know him formerly, and often sent him assistance when he was in distress. He lives in some wretched little place in

London ; I fear he is not very likely to assist us much."

"Yet," said Rosamond, "Mr. Richard Conway would not hold out false hopes to us, I cannot help feeling as if he would bring us some good."

"You are a dear little romantic darling, and are always *feeling* something," said Blanche with a slight touch of ridicule, "but look at this, dear child, where is it?" she added, turning over his letter, "'you know me well enough to believe that I would not take a step except according to strict law and justice. No, not to save my life . . . ' the smallest possible shadow of a reproach, is it not, dear? in case you had imagined he had interfered or meddled with the will."

"Perhaps," admitted Rosamond, "unless . . . no, I confess, I do not exactly know what it is I hope."

"I suppose," said Blanche, "as there will be a great many people, we shall be

in the drawing-room, it is more like Autumn than Summer to-day, so cold and chilly; would not you have a fire?"

"Of course, why did you not order one," answered Rosamond, "and a room that is seldom used always feels damp and uncomfortable."

"I have had a note too," rejoined Blanche, "and a really kind one from Lady Dornington. More so than I should have expected from her; but I begin to see that great troubles extinguish all petty jealousies," and she gave it to Rosamond to read.

"My dear Miss Conway,

"Henry tells me that you are now at Crown-Harden, and I must send you a hurried line to express my sincere sympathy in your present anxieties, as well as my deep interest in your

brother's welfare, for whom I always had a most friendly feeling. I cannot for a moment suppose that the Grand Jury will find; but should the country-gentlemen prove themselves such ill-judging persons, of course the trial could have but one termination. At the same time I am anxious to show my opinion of the case, and shall make a point of being at Deerham Park during the time, when I shall endeavour to persuade you to make my house your home. Rosamond Granville must not quarrel with me for wishing to take you away from her, but must also join us if she will do so."

"It is very kind," said Rosamond, "and I think it will be an advantage to Cecil to show how warmly his friends espouse his cause. I was sorry to hear this morning that poor old

Mr. Henshaw is not likely to recover."

"I am glad you did not neglect the poor old man," said Blanche; "the shock of his son's death was too much for him, but he has long been declining."

"Oh, Blanche!" exclaimed Rosamond, recurring in thought to her own letter, "I do believe to-day will decide much."

"You are so imaginative, I can only see things as they are," replied Blanche. "I see no reason for placing such wonderful confidence in poor old Don Ricardo."

And she was surprised to see Rosamond in a state of unabated excitement during the whole of the day; her colour varied each time the door opened, and sudden footsteps outside made her tremble; at one time she was desponding, at another full of animation, and she was perpetually looking at her watch and comparing it with the clock on the chimney-piece.

They made their dinner at luncheon, and as the hour approached, Blanche, who had before looked with a superior air at her cousin's fanciful expectations, began in a less degree to share in her anxious suspense.

At last the clocks on the chimney-piece and the cheffoniers chimed out one after the other their tinkling music, half-past four; and while they still rang out their tiny bells, the door was thrown open, and several gentlemen entered, among them Mr. Richard Conway.

Blanche and Rosamond advanced to meet him and shake hands with him, an operation that seemed more than usually painful to Mr. Richard Conway, in consequence of a fresh accession of nervousness. He smiled, turned grave, came forward, then stepped back, with the fine mahogany bloom on his countenance deepening at each movement; the others bowed, and after the few preliminaries of finding seats,

and noticing the weather—which, being cold for the season, of course Mr. Conway pronounced to be very hot, at the same time taking his stand in front of the large fire—seemed to recover their senses, and to recollect what they had come for.

Just then a fresh visitor made his appearance, and Villeroy, looking by contrast with the black-coated men of business unusually dandy, bowed politely as he passed the cousins quietly, and seated himself near a remote window.

“I have I have to tell you that I have returned,” began Mr. Richard Conway in distressed confusion. A pause followed this striking communication.

“I think you have something else to tell, Mr. Conway,” said a shrewd-looking, middle-aged gentleman, Mr. Harding, the barrister.

“Yes, certainly—certainly—I have the pleasure of telling you that the missing will is here.”

Blanche and Rosamond sprang from their seats.

"Then," cried Blanche, "Cecil is clear; he is free."

"Unquestionably so, and we hope tomorrow early to see him here," was the reply.

"Oh, heavens! that is all I care for, all I wish, all that Cecil asks!"

"But there is a good deal more to hear that will, no doubt, have an interest both for you and your brother," said Mr. Harding, "this is the document in question which has been seen and recognized by competent witnesses. Miss Granville, you will no doubt recollect it as the will of Nicholas Conway, and recognize the signature appended in his own handwriting, whereby you and your brother are constituted his almost sole heirs."

Rosamond came slowly forward, the parchment was spread out open on the table, Mr. Richard Conway standing by

the side, nervously twitching up his coat-tails under his arms.

"Yes," said Rosamond, "that is the will. Who took it? How?"

"You shall hear all," said Mr. Conway, "if you have patience, my dear, . . . I mean my dear Miss Granville. But first a little ceremony may as well take place. You kept it as safely as you could in the old oak cabinet, but you will perhaps admit that a more secure place might be found. Will you entrust it to me?"

"Gladly," replied she.

"Is it at my disposal?"

"As far as I am concerned, yes, a thousand times," she answered.

She glanced up at him, he looked very grave, but she detected a smiling sparkle in his eye.

"I believe I am correct," he said, and he turned to Mr. Harding, and Mr. Andrews the solicitor, who sat by the side of the barrister.

"Quite so," answered Mr. Harding.

"It is a little peculiar fancy of my own," said Mr. Richard Conway, and taking the will, he refolded it with the utmost care, using every precaution to turn it exactly in the same creases that it had before, and cautiously undoing it in part because one way was bent wrong. When this was completed to his entire satisfaction, he gave a peculiar and knowing smile, with a very earnest look at Rosamond, who still stood near, and suddenly to her unbounded astonishment he thrust it into the midst of the fire, holding it down with the poker, while the cruel parchment, which had half broken so many hearts, crackled, writhed, and shuddered almost like a living thing in pain.

Rosamond gazed in speechless amazement. Blanche could not refrain from uttering a short cry.

Everyone waited till little was left but

black fragments of tinder and dust, and then Mr. Harding spoke :

“I must introduce this gentleman to you, Miss Conway, and Miss Granville, not as Mr. Richard Conway, but as Mr. Reuben Conway, the eldest brother of Mr. Nicholas Conway, and consequently, your uncle, and the rightful owner of the estate of Crown-Harden and all appertaining to it.”

Rosamond fell into his arms, and Blanche sprang towards him and embraced him. The violent revulsion of feeling caused poor Blanche, who was but little given generally to the melting mood, to burst into an ungovernable hysterical rush of tears. Rosamond, pale from excess of emotion after long suspense, was supported only by her uncle's arm around her waist. He seated the two young girls together in one large easy-chair by his side, and stood close over them, clasping Rosamond's death-cold hand in his.

"I am desired by Mr. Reuben Conway to give as short an account as I can of all that has led to this consummation," said Mr. Harding.

"But first say, does Cecil know of this?" inquired Blanche.

"We have but now been able to conclude our work, and it is too late this evening to obtain admission with any good purpose; but we hope to-morrow, as soon as possible, to be able to restore him to you. All is arranged so as to avoid farther delay," Mr. Harding said.

"Oh, but to-night," urged Rosamond, "suppose anything should happen to him in the night?"

As this was the first unreasonable word that Rosamond had spoken, it was excused.

"He will be with you, I hope, at breakfast," replied Mr. Harding. "Miss

Granville, does this key resemble the one in your possession?"

And he brought to her a steel key, the fac-simile of her own silver one.

"Yes, the same," she answered.

"Yours belonged to Mr. Nicholas Conway; this one to his brother Reuben. Their attachment to each other was perhaps unusually strong in the earlier days of their life. Everything of interest to both brothers was preserved in that old cabinet, and each had a key to it.

"The original silver one Mr. Reuben Conway gave to his brother, who had a taste for curiosities. This steel one was made in imitation of it twenty-five years ago, and has been in Mr. Reuben Conway's safe keeping ever since. When Mr. Reuben Conway made his last venture to China—then still a young though

very successful man—he left a will bequeathing to his brother all he possessed, in case of accident or misadventure; for in those days it was not so common or easy a thing to run all over the face of this earth of ours as it is now.

“In fact, the ship he was in was attacked by pirates, sunk, and, as it was supposed, everyone on board perished in the Indian seas. But Mr. Reuben Conway, with two companions, was spared in the general disaster, and escaped death in a remarkable manner.

“Mr. Reuben Conway had a good general knowledge of medicine and surgery, and with his usual benevolence had been able, even before the turmoil of the attack was fairly over, to assist a young man, the son of the chief pirate, by skilfully and rapidly binding up his wounded limb, thus by stopping the effu-

sion of blood probably saving the youth's life.

“ In gratitude for this act, he and two of the sailors were spared, and carried away prisoners. I cannot tell how long they remained among these savage people on an island in those seas, sharing many of their adventures, though no doubt unwillingly enough. They will, I dare say, furnish amusement and interest for your Winter fireside by the story of their romantic and hair-breadth escape from slavery, though the skill and knowledge of Mr. Reuben Conway in the healing art much assisted in ameliorating his condition among them.

“ However, eventually he and his two companions were picked up by a South American trading vessel, and in it they made their way to the Brazils, but of course penniless.

“ Shortly after they had landed, Mr. Conway's companions found means to

get to New York, where they had friends, and Mr. Conway at last was able to obtain employment with a merchant at so small a salary as barely to suffice to keep him.

“Here his romantic fate still attended him; for the daughter of the gentleman by whom he was employed became attached to him, and after various difficulties they obtained the father’s consent, on condition that they should never leave Brazil or his home there during this gentleman’s lifetime.

“They were married, but unhappily he was soon left a widower and childless. His employer gave way to sorrow so excessive at the loss of his favourite and only daughter, as to prevent his paying attention to business. He became involved in difficulties; but at last gave up the management of his affairs entirely to Mr. Reuben Conway, who with his ability and untiring energy so far retrieved his fortunes

as to free him from debt, and secure enough to enable his father-in-law to retire on a competency, only retaining a very moderate portion of his gains for himself.

“Not long ago, his friend and benefactor dying, Mr. Conway followed the dictates of his heart and at once set sail for England, determined, however, never to touch the inheritance that his brother—of course supposing him to be dead—had so long enjoyed the possession of.

“On calling on Mr. Andrews when he reached London—a former friend of his—he learnt to his sorrow that his brother was deceased, and the property left, Mr. Andrews did not exactly know how, among his nephews and nieces, but he had understood in a manner not altogether satisfactory. Mr. Andrews had conversed with his former friend without recognising him, so totally was

his appearance changed by the effect of a hot climate and unusual hardships."

"Yes, my dear," put in Mr. Conway, dolorously, "I was once quite a handsome man."

Mr. Harding smiled, and while Rosamond pressed her uncle's hand, and looked up with a sweet expression into his kind eyes, Mr. Harding proceeded:

"Mr. Andrews did not for a moment dispute or disbelieve his identity, but his belief was grounded solely on Mr. Conway's assurances. Well, as I need not inform you, Mr. Reuben Conway, under the name of Mr. Richard Conway, paid a visit at Crown-Harden, not intending to make known who he really was, as he did not mean to take possession; and, as I think you must have discovered, being a singularly modest man, he was glad to avoid all appearance of renunciation, of bestowing favours, of wishing to receive

thanks. It was not until he was persuaded that the disposal of the property was far from affording happiness to any of the parties concerned, that he determined to interfere. Then it was that, supposing he would be able to return to Crown-Harden from town in the course of a day or two, opening the cabinet with the key belonging to him, he took the will of Nicholas Conway, as well as his own prior testament, with him up to London, to consult privately with Mr. Andrews, warning him to keep his secret with all care, not even imparting it to the gentleman who was associated with him in business.

“But now a difficulty arose. Mr. Andrews considered that his identity could not be sufficiently established without the testimony of one or both of his companions in misfortune, and it was then that Mr. Reuben Conway committed the only error with which he can be charged. He wrote a letter to Miss Granville, not explaining

the circumstances, to prevent hopes being raised that might fail through his own death, or misadventure—for his strange fate had given him a mistrust in the future—but stating merely that he had taken the will from the cabinet, being entitled to do so; how, he would explain hereafter. But this letter, which would have obviated all the difficulties and prevented all the complications that have since arisen, he committed to a private hand, instead of entrusting it to the proper and safe medium of the post—an error that somewhat old-fashioned people are prone to fall into, and that he most deeply regrets.”

“I do, my dear, my dear Miss Blanche; I do indeed,” said the poor man, almost in tears.

“He was desirous of avoiding farther communication with the Crown-Harden family, for the reason I have before mentioned—a doubt lest his purpose should

not succeed, and fresh disappointments ensue; but the rest of the business he completed with perfect good sense and ingenuity.

“He took Mr. Andrews with him across to New York, obtained thorough and undeniable proofs of his identity, and to make all doubly sure, brought back one of his witnesses with him, as well as the properly-signed attestation of the other, with every necessary formality. In London he, with the assistance of Mr. Andrews, got the necessary formulas to empower him to execute his intentions. I will not trouble you with a recapitulation of all he had to do; I will only say that by sparing neither trouble nor money, he got them executed with unusual rapidity, and there, too, he received your very sensible and acute letter, Miss Granville, in which you showed a quickness of apprehension and logical turn of mind that would make you a most valuable

member of our profession, if you turned your thoughts that way. This young lady, on the very slightest grounds, almost divined the entire truth."

Every eye was turned on Rosamond, but she was far too deeply interested and forgetful of self to think of shyness. She scarcely indeed attended to the reference to herself.

"You now fully understand that the property belonging thenceforward to Mr. Reuben Conway, it was in his power alone to dispose of it. The deeds are not completed yet, though the disposal is decided on."

"Dear Uncle Reuben," said Blanche, "I hope you will keep it yourself, and let us live with you as your children."

The old man shook his head. "No, no my dear young lady — no, to me it would only be a disagreeable incumbrance. I only ask one favour; may I

take the liberty of asking only one favour?"

"Of course," said Blanche, "if you will grant one to me."

"What is it may I venture to ask?"

"You call Rosamond 'my dear,' and me 'young lady;' make no difference between us."

"My dear Blanche, my dear, dear Blanche," he said with emotion, "I love you just as much; but there is something more—not exactly majestic—but intimidating in your style of beauty, your grand air I know not what. But my favour is granted by both, I trust?"

"Yes," they both replied.

"That you will accept the arrangements I make without a single comment, or word of thanks."

"Since it must be so," said Blanche, and Rosamond kissed his hand.

"And now, as I dare say these ladies

are fatigued by such long explanations, may we take leave to retire to the dining-room?" said Uncle Reuben, as he was now called by everyone. "I think Mr. Harding will not be sorry to have some dinner."

It was nearly eight o'clock, as the cousins were glad to see, for they were both impatient for the next day to dawn.

CHAPTER XV.

“**H**OW was it possible for you, dearest Rosamond to imagine that Richard Conway, as we thought him, had any concern in the affair?” asked Blanche, as the two girls were left alone together after the gentlemen had gone down.

Rosamond told her what her brother had said in a manner as little to his disadvantage as she could, as well as Thomas Benson’s assertion that he had seen another such key, and added Rosamond,

“I was sure from his manner and his endeavour to recall the memory of it,

that he was looking far back to former days. I recollected that Richard Conway had known Uncle Nicholas when they were young, and with other associations, too slight to dwell on, I did imagine that it was possible he had possessed that other key, and might have taken the will for some unknown purpose, though I never suspected that he was Uncle Reuben."

Rosamond was also right in suspecting that Stephen had seen the key.

On the day when Mr. Richard Conway had made his presents, he had, in his confusion, dropped it out of his pocket-book.

Stephen found it lying on a small table near where they had all stood; he was in the act of taking it in his hand when he was disturbed by the entrance of some one; he went out hurriedly, and when he returned to look for the key it was gone. Uncle Reuben had missed it, and found

it again as he supposed unnoticed by any one.

"It is nearly nine, what a mercy!" said Blanche, "to-morrow morning will soon be here! Oh, when I think of Cecil being among us all again, cleared of every suspicion, I scarcely know how to bear my happiness! Yesterday in the depths of misery—to-day such joy!"

They determined to go to bed early.

"I shall not close my eyes all night," said Blanche.

"Nor I," rejoined Rosamond.

But both were so utterly exhausted with what they had gone through, and returning peace was so tranquillizing, that little as they expected it, both were fast asleep in half an hour.

Blanche reposed in her beautiful bedroom, with its purple silk hangings and gilded toilet table, and dressing-room and

bath-room, all luxuriously fitted up for the delectation of the blue eyes that were now so peacefully closed, as the pretty face reclined like a rose-bud on the fine linen and lace pillows; while Rosamond, in a more unpretending apartment, but fresh and pleasant with its white muslin draperies and rose-besprinkled walls, slept calm and placid, her long brown eyelashes still glistening with grateful tears.

Rosamond, who was up first in the morning, went out into the garden to breathe the purity of the fresh air; but on seeing Blanche at her open window nearly dressed, she had run upstairs to put a finishing touch to her dress before breakfast. Her door was ajar, when she heard quick light steps in the hall, which sent all the blood rushing to her heart, and through a crack in the door she caught a glimpse of her cousin Cecil ascending the stairs four

steps at a time; he gave one knock at Blanche's dressing-room door, then flew forward, and the brother and sister were in each other's arms.

"Where is darling Rosamond?" she heard him say.

"Rosamond! Rosamond!" cried Blanche.

Rosamond entered, bewildered with joy and confusion; Cecil sprang towards her, and clasping both hands in his, gazed speechless with emotion in her face.

"Give him a cousinly kiss, poor fellow!" said Blanche.

Cecil softly slid his arm round her slight waist, pressed her gently to him, and kissed her cheek.

"May I?" he asked timidly, after the deed was done. Blanche laughed.

"That is the safest way," she said, "secure it first."

Rosamond turned away blushing.

"You are not angry?" he asked.

"No," she whispered, "I am too happy."

"Oh, Rosamond! I have many things to ask you," said Cecil.

"Wait till after breakfast," Blanche exclaimed, "a comfortable, happy, hungry breakfast will be such a novelty. You darling Cecil! you look as if you had not tasted breakfast, dinner, or tea since we were together last. How very pale you are!"

Cecil coloured. He knew that he was cleared before all the world, but he had been near infamy, though it had not touched him, and his proud, honourable, sensitive nature revolted from the memory; it was long before he could shake off the impression of those harrowing, agonizing days. Partly from consideration for his sister, partly from a repugnance to being pitied, he had suppressed all show of suffering, but the pain was the deeper;

had it lasted longer, it would have undermined a constitution which though good, was not naturally very strong. As it was, he had lost as much of strength and vigour in that short time, as if he had gone through an illness.

"You look very delicate," Blanche added, affectionately stroking and patting his cheek.

"Don't, Blanche," he said, "it is only the want of fresh air and exercise. I am out all day generally you know."

They all went down to the dining-room where already stood Uncle Reuben, or rather where he hurried about, uncertain where to go, or whether to sit or stand, and dreadfully ashamed at seeing Cecil, on whom he had brought so much evil.

"I am grieved, distressed, ashamed—" he said, alternately jerking out and drawing back his hand, in a style so awkward and so nervous, that Cecil was unable to catch or grasp it.

"Won't you shake hands with me, Uncle Reuben?" asked Cecil with a good-natured smile.

"Can you, my dear Sir—my dear Cecil, can you pardon—excuse—forgive?" began Uncle Reuben in much agitation.

"I wish I had only a trifling mistake to ask forgiveness for," said Cecil frankly.

"I have been an unlucky man all my life," Uncle Reuben rejoined, "but I esteem this last by far the worst of my errors, for it has involved others."

"It is all over now," said Blanche cheerily, "and some of us will be wiser henceforward, I hope. Will you have coffee?—I beg your pardon, Rosamond!" she suddenly exclaimed, rising from her chair, for she had unwittingly taken her old seat at the head of the table.

"It is your place, dearest Blanche, and always will be," answered Rosamond.

"No, no, no—not so," put in Uncle Reuben, then checked himself abruptly,

blushing deeply at his own indiscretion.

“Pray remain where you are, Blanche, I know that *for the present* Rosamond is happier to see you there.”

He spoke with so much earnestness and pointed meaning, that every one felt for a moment a slight touch of embarrassment. It appeared to be a most palpable hint that Rosamond was still intended to be hereafter the mistress of Crown-Harden, but it must not be supposed that one ungenerous thought or regret crossed the mind of Blanche, much less of her brother.

Rosamond herself felt far more embarrassment than either. She coloured violently, and put her little pat of butter into her coffee-cup instead of sugar. Without making a remark Cecil got up and pouring it into the slop-basin, held her cup to be replenished. This fortunate little mishap revived everyone's spirits, and broke the slight band of

restraint. Blanche laughed, though she made no comment, and all were happy and at ease again.

"I rather hoped we should have seen the Honourable Mr. Henry Villeroy this morning," observed Uncle Reuben.

"Oh, Uncle !" cried Blanche, "remember you are not in old Castile nor even in Brazil; you must not give people all their honours in full, nobody here does, you must call him Villeroy, or if you like, Mr. Villeroy."

"Mr. Villeroy then," said Reuben Conway, "I could not take a liberty with a gentleman of so aristocratic an appearance. I can see the "sangre azul," the blue blood, there plainly enough. What a very handsome, prepossessing young man he is. As dark and noble as a Spaniard, but with the true cast of a high-born Englishman."

And he glanced at Blanche, fancying he had hit the right nail on the head

this time, and had given her pleasure in a way meant to be very unconscious and private, but in reality so openly declaring his thoughts that Blanche could not help laughing.

“ Oh ! he is pretty well as young men go,—not half so handsome as Cecil though !” she exclaimed.

Poor Uncle Reuben looked excessively puzzled, and mused over his toast for a considerable space of time.

It was hardly possible to imagine a full-grown man to be so brimming over with infantine simplicity and guilelessness as tough old Uncle Reuben. He seemed born to encourage the ingenious science of “ chaff,” but all present loved him far too well to dream of practising on his boundless innocence.

As for Cecil, he had left all his boyish follies behind him within the grim gates of Deerham prison. It was a stern figure that held the mirror before his eyes, but

he had looked steadily at what he beheld there, and never forgot the impression it gave.

Rosamond went out after breakfast to get fresh flowers for the vases—an occupation which Blanche had formerly assigned her, and which she still kept up.

Blanche, seeing herself alone with Uncle Reuben, looked round and asked where was Stephen Granville ?

“Does he know all that has happened ?”

“Yes,” was the reply, “he has gone off in high displeasure, I believe to town, but has left word that he will be here again before long. I do not think we shall miss him much ; his society does not greatly conduce to the hilarity of the party.”

Blanche, throwing a handkerchief over her head, went out through the French windows to look for Rosamond. The flower-beds were glowing with tulips, early geraniums, calceolarias and blossoms of every hue. The lengthened morning sha-

dows lay clear as inlaid work on the smooth green lawns; a small fountain shot its silver thread high into the air, plashing down again on the cool basin below, where gold and silver fish, in bright, unmeaning vivacity, shot hither and thither—some feeble ray of joy perhaps enlivening their vacant existence, as the sun shone, and the waters bubbled their tinkling music; the birds, far happier in their leafy bowers above, thrilled out the rapture of their little hearts in song and movement.

The old house stood red and sturdy in the face of the morning sun, and Blanche, looking round, thought that, after all, the formal, comfortable, home-like old place was very dear to her, and she was glad not to be banished from it for ever.

A soft cerulean haze was over the woods, the rocks, the hills behind, and the grim tower stood there, the only

frowning object in the bright landscape, like a worn and aged man ever recurring to the days of the past.

As she thus stood, Rosamond and Villeroy by her side, joined her; they loitered on together; at the house-steps Rosamond went in to arrange her flowers in bouquets for the vases, while Blanche and Villeroy carelessly wandered on to a shady walk towered over with tall laurels.

"You were right about Rosamond, Mr. Villeroy, I never before did her any sort of justice. I love her dearly now."

"She is a very nice girl," he said, in a somewhat absent mood. "But, Miss Conway, you well know that in my eyes there is but one really perfect woman in the world. I wish I could think she was not so utterly indifferent to me."

Blanche appeared not to hear a word he was saying.

"Oh yes, Mr. Villeroy! I know your generous attachment to my brother, and

believe me, I am not ungrateful. Ah, Mr. Villeroy," she continued, "I have a little pet project of my own; I wish I could venture to confide it to you—you would not be vexed with me?" she inquired softly.

"Vexed with you! what do you think I am made of? every word you speak is dear to me, every time you address me you make me happy."

"Then since you are so kind, I will take courage; Rosamond is a truly sweet girl—Ah! it would give me such pleasure to call you also cousin; she is an heiress too, after all, for Uncle Reuben means to leave Crown-Harden to her, he said so this morning."

Villeroy turned impatiently, almost angrily away.

"If you had a heart, if you had a grain of feeling, you could not treat me in this way."

"Oh! I thought just now you said I

was perfect ; but I did not quite hear, was it I of whom you spoke, or somebody else, perhaps you would kindly repeat what you said."

"Yes," Villeroy said; "a thousand, and a thousand times if you will—I love you, I love you, Blanche. Blanche will you marry me?"

Blanche bent her head the other way blushing. "I never will again," she said with an emphasis on the *again*, "promise to marry a man I could not love."

"Then answer me, dearest Blanche, you have now tormented me enough, can you love me?"

"Mr. Villeroy," said Blanche provokingly, "you have now tormented me enough, do ask for what it is in one's nature to do; can *you* talk like a rational being? Can you sing like Mademoiselle Titiens?"

"Blanche," said Villeroy sorrowfully, "you have every gift from heaven except

a heart; you can madden a man, but you will never make him happy. I cannot stay for you to make a jest of my love; farewell, dear, adored Blanche, I do not blame you—Farewell.”

He took her two hands, wrung them within his, and after one searching look in her face hurried away.

Blanche looked after him in some dismay.

“If I could—if I would send him one single line he would come back to me—but I cannot, if I am such a fool, I must be content to pay for it. I am just like that silly Egyptian coquette who took her best pearl and melted it away in her wine. If he loved me in real good earnest he would understand me better—he would know that mischief and frolic are stronger within me than I am. Frolic at such a moment! when all the hopes of his life and mine are in the balance! Oh! I can’t think what I am

made of!" the tears rose to her eyes. "No, I won't cry, that would never do—and how nice he looked just at that last minute! I never saw him look so nice."

And in spite of all a smile played about her lips. She had scarcely been so sitting and thinking ten minutes, when a tap came to her door. On desiring the applicant to come in, Sarah brought her a packet directed to herself.

First she found a letter saying the papers forwarded had been found sealed up in a small cask at Bartray Bay on the South coast; and that the finder had forwarded them according to the direction within. Blanche, in extreme astonishment, opened the packet.

It was the very paper that Villeroys had written, and committed to the waves at the time of the anticipated shipwreck of the *Ariel*; scarcely under-

standing at first what it meant, she read the note to his mother.

“If I do not get safe home, I know you will forward the last wishes of your son, my dearest mother. I wish Cecil and Blanche to have Burton-Hassett, and have left it to them. Good-bye, dearest, kindest of mothers. I am quite happy. Do not grieve too much.”

Then she turned to the second paper, written in a large bold hand.

“I bequeath to my dear friend, Cecil Conway, and his sister Blanche, my estate at Burton-Hassett, to be equally divided between them.”

Below was written more hurriedly :—

“Dear Cecil,

“I hope this will reach you if I am never to see you again, and that you

will have no trouble if there is any informality about the legacy. Tell my dear Blanche that my last thoughts on earth were for her.

“Signed, HENRY VILLEROY.

“Witnesses, { JOHN WARDEN, Master.
THOMAS STOKES, Sailor.”

As she read these lines, every tender word burnt in her very heart. The generous act—the love—the considerate, thoughtful affection, sent a whole tide of feeling through her soul, and she bitterly regretted that she should have so shamefully returned it with levity and ingratitude!

She burst into a passion of tears; with her head bent on the table, she sobbed convulsively, while at that very moment Cecil gently opened the door and looked in. Without a word he closed it again, and hastened down to the stables where Villeroy stood dark

and gloomy, watching the man saddling his horses.

Without a word, Cecil passed his arm through that of his friend and drew him away.

"I would be angry with Blanche if I could, but I can't, she was so good to me," said Cecil, "there she is in the boudoir, crying her heart out."

"Crying!" exclaimed Villeroy, "you do not mean it!"

"Go and see," said Cecil.

Half doubting, Villeroy ran lightly up, and tapped at the door; but as no answer came and he had often lately been admitted there, he opened it, and saw, as Cecil had said, Blanche in most unusual agitation. She looked up and with a little cry flew towards him, and the next moment was weeping on his shoulder.

"Oh, Henry! how can you love me?"

I am not half good enough—generous that you are !”

“How? what?” he inquired in surprise.

“Look at those, she exclaimed, “and you never said a word of it. I might never have known it. Oh, Henry! I always loved you—always; but now I am proud to tell you so, I will try to be worthy of you; I am not so bad as I seem.”

“Bad !” you little angel !” Villeroy interrupted, “I can hardly believe in my happiness; but you will not fly from me again, like a little tricky fairy, my Blanche, my Ariel. I always thought you an Ariel, and that’s why I called my yacht so.”

“But now,” replied Blanche, “I won’t be an Ariel, but a girl who loves you with her whole heart, and will be good if she can.”

So between earnest and happy nonsense they related to each other their love. She

had never known before how much she had needed the full repast of love, and how blissfully it satisfied all the blind cravings of her heart, though she would not always allow even Villeroy to hear it; but he was perfectly contented, though Blanche still declined to appear either conscious or sentimental, but much as usual, playful, self-possessed, a little self-willed, but perfectly composed, modest and sensible.

Villeroy was persuaded that though neither poetical nor enthusiastic, her affection was sufficient to bestow happiness on him, and far from cooling, would rather perhaps increase; nor was he mistaken, for though Blanche would have considered it an unpardonable affront if anyone had guessed it, she had long loved Villeroy in her own reasonable way; and, moreover, to own a truth that she would not have had torn from her by wild horses, she had felt some

the same string of jealousy concerning
Blanche.

A week or two passed in quiet happiness.

Madame de Morington, who had arrived at the man Park, never did things by halves. When she heard that she accepted Blanche as her future daughter-in-law, she did it not only with a good grace, but with a warmth so kind and affectionate that Blanche, forgetting all her old prejudices, returned it with grateful affection. She was greatly much improved; a touch of what could scarcely be called hardness, but perhaps carelessness in her manner, now wholly disappeared, and gave place to a softness that made her more engaging yet no less dignified, while Villeroy, whom some people had thought too quiet, became inspired by her gaiety and animation.

CHAPTER XVI.

STEPHEN had, as Mr. Reuben Conway declared, left Crown-Harden for London on the first impulse of rage at the discovery of the missing will; but on second thoughts, he determined to return for a time to the place he disliked, and among the people he hated.

“If that stupid old duffer has the power to upset everything,” he said to himself, “I should be a fool if I did not keep a sharp look-out on my fifteen thousand pounds. I suppose as he goes in for goodness, and virtue, and conscience, and all that style of thing, he won’t be such an unprincipled brute as to do me. If he did

play me such a rascally trick, by George ! I only wish I could roast him alive like a chestnut ; he'd make a sweet *auto da fé*, and would burn like dry wood, I guess ; a dry old chip ! he'd make a pretty blaze, I calculate," drawling out the last word in mimicry of his uncle.

Occupied with such amiable cogitations, he was slowly wending his way along the very lane by which Blanche and Cecil had left Crown-Harden, as they believed, for the last time, some few months ago, muttering half-audibly the evil thoughts of his heart, and now and then a fierce oath or expression of ill-will escaping him.

"Will those two—that she tiger-cat and that hound her brother be made the favourites again ? By heavens ! if we're to be turned off for them, I'll make them pay for it—I'll be revenged."

These last words he spoke aloud, and was startled by a deep gruff voice in reply.

“Will you though?”

And to his amazement Big Ben stood beside him.

“Young gentleman,” he continued, “I know a few secrets of yours. You had better mind what you’re about. If anything goes wrong, I will show you up, and they shall know which way to look if mischief is brewing.”

Granville stood staring at him with fiery eyes, like some dangerous animal at bay. If wishes could slay, Ben would not have stood there long to defy him.

“I’ll tell you what, young Sir, your best place would be across the water. England’s but a small place to hold two such as you and I. You can’t hurt me, for I don’t care a shot what you says about me, but I can be the ruin of you; think about it, young Sir, think about it. And one word more, I can tell you something of your fortune that you don’t know

yourself. It won't be much, though it's better than you deserve."

"Insolent rascal!" exclaimed Granville, his rage boiling over, "big as you are, I'll strangle you, if you dare to be impudent to me."

"I dare say you would if you could," answered Ben, with a laugh.

"What are you doing lounging about here, you poaching vagabond?"

"I'm here in case I'm wanted, Sir; I can give you a character as you well know. But if you're curious to hear the news, the lawyer's deeds are come up to the place yonder, and you're not to be the rich man you was, I know that much."

"Hound!" cried Granville, doubling his fist, and half inclined to attack the strong, big man. Ben looked at him.

"Come, you are a plucky one after all; but I don't want to fight you, you've trouble before you, youngster, don't make

it worse. New Zealand's the place for you. Time was when I should have liked to have gone there myself."

Stephen laughed fiercely and derisively at this assumption of superiority on the poacher's part, and pushing roughly past him, took his way to the house.

Ben's history may as well be told before he lounges round the corner out of sight, swaying his big form to and fro as he walks, much after the fashion of a sailor on shore.

Blanche, who never forgot old friends, wrote to Mrs. Brewster, as soon as Cecil was free, and had sent a pressing invitation to her and Lizzie, to come and see her at Crown-Harden, offering at the same time, after a little consultation with Rosamond, a situation to her younger daughter, Sally, her former servant at the Lodge. It was joyfully accepted. Sally was introduced to and placed under the care of Mrs. Benson, who also undertook

to make Mrs. Brewster and Elizabeth comfortable.

Ben not being apprised of this arrangement, was a little surprised at meeting Lizzie one evening in the back shrubbery.

He did not often condescend to show astonishment at any phenomenon, whether physical or moral, therefore he only stared a minute, and then said :

“ Oh, it's you, Lizzie ! ”

Lizzie, who was by no means a philosopher, sprang forward, and he received her, as she expected, in his embrace.

“ Well, Ben, now isn't it kind of Miss Conway ? Mother and Sarah and I are all here on a visit—everyone on us ; and what a beautiful place, to be sure ! ”

“ The place is well enough,” said Ben, calmly.

“ And dear, dear ! what ups and downs,

to be sure ! Nobody knows what they'll come to."

"No," sighed Ben.

"But it's all well that ends well, you know. I suppose there'll be some weddings going on here soon. I should like to dress Miss Blanche's hair for the occasion, and Miss Rosamond's too, for the matter of that. She's not so regular a beauty as Miss Blanche, but she's very pretty; and I'm sure I would not speak ill of anyone—it never was my way, as you know—but I must say, though Sarah Benson's a nice girl, she isn't what *I* fancy in the way of dressing hair; but then of course I've been to Paris, and of course that makes a difference, doesn't it now, Ben?"

"I dare say it does," Ben replied.

"But I say, Ben, all these wed-

dings make one feel thoughtful like."

"So they do," agreed Ben, whose heart smote him. It was a shame, he felt, to let the offered opportunity pass unimproved. "Lizzie," he said, "you have accepted me. It's more kindness than I could have looked for. If you have made up your mind to take me, won't you do it at once? Where's the good of waiting? I shan't change, and I doubt it won't mend matters to stand shilly-shally. I dare say I shall be better when it's over."

"Is it the marrying me you think of in that way, dear Ben? If it seems to you so much like taking a dose of medicine, or having a tooth drawn, or going out to take your first plunge in the sea at Brighton, why what need to do it at all? I love you, Ben, you know it, and dearly too; but to marry you, and you half unwilling like,

I'd rather a thousand and a thousand times be laid by little Jessie in the churchyard; and then, when my dear lad came to mourn over the little girl he loved, he would cast a kind thought on the other who loved him."

Poor Lizzie had spoken tearfully, and at the conclusion of this most pitiful speech, as it seemed to her, she began to cry. This was too much for Ben.

"Lizzie, if I cause you to shed tears—you who are so kind and good—I deserve to be kicked; and don't go thinking I'm such a brute as not to love you. I do; only it seems a pity almost for such a nice girl as you—however, if you don't think so, I'm sure it isn't for me."

And with a real genuine smile, the first since the night his darling died, he took her pocket-handkerchief out of her hand, and wiped her tears away very carefully, kissing her between whiles.

Lizzie was not likely long to resist these consolations, and in a very short time she was happy, and the wedding-day fixed.

"It's for you to name it," Ben said.

"Well," replied Lizzie, "that day week after Miss Blanche's, whenever that may be—not long, I'm sure, unless I'm blinder than I believe I am. Don't ask me to say sooner," she insisted, yielding to the sweet delusion that Ben might so entreat her, "for I can't and I won't. I've set my heart on helping to dress them and do their hair; and how could I do it if I was all in a flutter, as I should be, about my own wedding? No, Ben, it's no use saying another word—just one week after Miss Blanche's; and no day but that."

"There's one thing," said Ben, after all the preliminaries were fully settled, and who thought it wise to make all

conditions at once, "when we're married, Mr. Cecil, I believe, means to give me, or get me—for what is his wish is Miss Rosamond's—a situation here. If we do live here, I could not, I tell you, Lizzie, I could not altogether desert that place—you guess what I mean—that grave, you know, I must go and see it from time to time—we could visit Brewster and your mother, you see. Would it be a trouble to you to travel there once or twice in the year?"

"A trouble to me, Ben!" exclaimed Lizzie. "Nothing would be a trouble to me that pleased you; and besides I should like to go and see mother and dear father; and as to travelling, Lord bless you! you little know. What's that little travelling to me that's been to Paris and Brussels, and Belgium and France? Lord, Ben, I should think no more of it than of drinking a cup of tea!"

Ben did obtain the situation he

alluded to, a very comfortable one with a pretty cottage, and just the employment that suited him. It would have been difficult for him perhaps to settle down to regular steady labour, though he worked by fits so hard as to do in a few months as much as some men would in a year; but in his present occupation he had sufficient employment, and ample leisure as well.

His spare hours he spent in wood-carving, for which he had great taste, and made the most easy and good-humoured of husbands to his pleasant rosy little wife, who would sit looking on him at his carving, regarding him the while as one of the greatest geniuses of the age.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE only one of the party who gave much thought as to what was to be the purport of Uncle Reuben's deeds, was Rosamond. His very pointed observation at breakfast seemed to her as if it might bear a different construction from the one Blanche and Cecil had put upon it, and as she considered it privately in her own room, she blushed deeply at the suggestion that occurred to her, solitary and unseen as she was. She well knew that Uncle Reuben, though the most simple of men, was still one of those peculiarly artless persons who read secrets

of the heart more quickly than many very shrewd and apparently observant ones. He had possibly guessed at hers, and she trembled lest in the overflowings of his guileless confidences, he should say an indiscreet word on the fancy that might have dictated his observation in the morning; he might imagine that Cecil could be the owner of Crown-Harden, and yet that she might sit at the head of the table. The point was ere long settled.

The deeds arrived, and it was then made known that Blanche and Rosamond had each a handsome and an equal fortune settled on them. Stephen Granville had three thousand pounds, and Crown-Harden with the estate was made over to Cecil. In spite of his prohibition, Uncle Reuben had to submit to many thanks, and some embraces, the latter he made no objection to. It was impossible to find fault with any of his arrangements. As to Stephen, he was better

off than he deserved, and it was open to him either to continue in his profession, or to try his fortune in the colonies.

His choice was soon made, he determined on the latter course; he was never a favourite on board, his companions were not much disposed to quarrel, but still less to associate with him; to see his rival master at Crown-Harden was unendurable to him, and the presence of Ben was perpetual irritation to his mind. Cecil induced his uncle to consent to send him out with all requisite comfort without trenching on his small capital, he himself supplying the funds in his uncle's name; for Granville scornfully rejected all offers of friendly advances from him or Blanche, and was almost as bitter against his own sister Rosamond, and it must be owned that all experienced a sense of relief when he had taken his departure.

Some few days afterwards, Cecil entered the library where Rosamond, standing in the tall arched windows, was reading by the light of the setting sun; when unmoved, there was a sweet, placid calmness in her expression, but when she spoke or smiled she became irresistible, for then every turn of her features bespoke sensibility and intelligence.

She laid down her book as soon as Cecil entered, and turned on him her brightest smile.

"Rosamond," he said in great agitation, "there is something I long, yet scarcely dare, to tell you. Rosamond, I know how unworthy I am of you, I know it too well, believe me. I cannot live on here, seeing you daily and hourly, and feel that each time I look at you I love you more passionately than before. If you despise or dislike me, tell me so,

Rosamond, and I will go far away from here. I can bear it no longer."

"Dislike you! Oh, Cecil, you little know!"

"You cannot—you do not love me?" he asked, passionately. "Oh, speak!"

"I do," she said, in a trembling voice, and the next moment she was pressed to his heart.

"Oh, Rosamond! how little I deserve such happiness; but you cannot really love me, do you?"

How Rosamond convinced him it was never known, but he believed it, and was happy.

Mr. Conway, though not in the least surprised at either Blanche's or Cecil's revelations, was perfectly and completely satisfied; so that without being the heiress of Crown-Harden, little Rosamond had to sit at the head of the table as mistress, after all.

Lady Dornington kindly settled her house at Deerham Park on Villeroy and Blanche. She had a house in London as well as Hellingsley, a place she greatly preferred to Deerham as a residence, though she promised to be a frequent visitor there.

The two weddings were to take place on the same day, and shortly before the happy event, Blanche received a letter from Sir Philip Holland, with an enormous rose-coloured seal bearing his coat of arms.

“My very dear and pretty Miss Blanche,

“I accept with pride and pleasure the invitation to your wedding. I shall like to see how you look as a bride, and to give you my patriarchal blessing, as well as to lay at your feet a humble offering of rather fine emeralds. Permit me to tell you that I once did my very best to persuade Henry Villeroy to change his

mind, but if he had, I should have esteemed him a very sorry sneak. As it is, I feel proud of my niece elect, and not ashamed of my nephew. I only lay upon you one command, and that is before you settle yourself at Deerham you must come and pay me a visit at Holland Abbey, where you shall be princess paramount, exactly, I imagine, the position to suit your taste. You must inspect the place that will one day be your own, when the worthless dust that now makes up Philip Holland shall rest beneath the very ugly monumental effigies of the family. *Je vous baise les mains, belle Blanche, &c.*

A very little tear sparkled in Blanche's eye as she read the letter—she scarcely knew why. She never for a moment supposed such a thing, but the tough and rough Sir Philip, who had never cared for a woman for the last thirty years, had felt

a little aching in an unknown district within him, and had he been half the age he really was, it would have given him a strange, and to him incomprehensible, delight to call Blanche Lady Holland ; as it was, he swallowed down the vain desire, and resolved to make a kind uncle to her instead ; and so he proved himself, while everyone wondered at the change from his bearish churlishness to a blunt but kindly demeanour. It was not so surprising that a solitary, unloved and unhappy man should improve under the influence of affection and a gay, kind, lively nature like that of Blanche, who never would suffer him to rust over, like old armour, as she told him.

Uncle Reuben could not be persuaded to make Crown-Harden his home, but bought a small house not far from the park-gates, and took infinite delight in fitting it up after his own bachelor fashion. To complete his satisfaction, a large

case of stuffed animals arrived from Brazil, that Blanche privately declared were only fit for a travelling showman, but were the delight of his innocent heart.

A large panther, with glaring yellow glass eyes, glowered from beneath the hall table, while a particularly ugly bird of prey, a condor eagle, which Blanche ignorantly and provokingly called a great vulture, spread its huge wings above the umbrellas and parasols. Prim cases, which Blanche always fancied smelt of putty and camphor, were ranged along the passages, with birds sitting in affected attitudes, or flying with out-spread wings that were never destined to move.

What matter? the old man was happy—as perfectly so in his way as the brilliant bride of Villeroy, or the good and gentle little Rosamond, or her young husband.

To both of them the ruined tower was ever an unfailing memento of their early

loves, fears, and wishes. Above its grey summit, which had once appeared to them so stern and threatening, sunny memories now hovered. So it is in life, when we can only see a frowning future, growing darker the longer we dwell on it, while perhaps, at the same moment the ray is dawning that is to illumine our after-lives.

In due time the morning came when the bells rang merrily, the house was overflowing with guests, the poor were feasted in the park, and a little Conway, a son and heir, was to be christened in the village church, while a broad banner, embroidered by the fair fingers of Rosamond, waved proudly over the old tower of Crown-Harden.

THE END.

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